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THE GREY FRIAR,

AND THE

BLACK SPIRIT OF THE WYE.

A ROMANCE.

Lane, Darling, and Co. Leadenhall-Street.

THE

GREY FRIAR,

AND THE

Black Spirit of the Wye:

A ROMANCE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

JOHN ENGLISH, ESQ.
OF BLACKWOOD HALL.

The mind cannot rest satisfied with reality, but gladly forsaking philosophy for fiction, wanders with pleasure and delight into the wild universe of conjecture.
LIPSCOMB'S MATLOCK.

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THE

GREY FRIAR,

AND THE

BLACK SPIRIT OF THE WYE.

CHAP. I.

THE anxiety of Sir Hugh de Bolebec and his Lady, at this critical moment, in which expectation had again revived, and hope once more began to dawn, was even greater, if possible, than when they counted the lingering hours of that tedious night on which the lovely Edward first disappeared.

The hermitage in which Merlin had fixed his solitary abode, was about two miles distant from the banks of the Wye. Rosemont ruins were part of an antient castle, once inhabited by the Mortimers, who had long abandoned the dilapidated edifice, for their more magnificent residence at Wigmore. The building, thus neglected, had fallen into complete decay, and was every where overgrown with brambles, or hidden among the ivy. It had been, time immemorial, the haunt of wolves and foxes; the portentous croaking of the raven resounded from the tottering battlements; and the melancholy note of the solitary bird of night, was echoed by the broken arches. It was so melancholy and so dismal in its appearance, that without much violence of metaphor, it might have been described as the "*habitation of dragons,*" and "*the place where satyrs dwell.*"

Such, indeed, was the universal prejudice of the cottagers, partly inculcated by the growing terrors of hereditary superstitions,

tions, partly arising from the depredations committed upon their flocks by the prowling wolf, who made the vaults of the castle of Rosemont his retreat, that not a living soul would approach the ruins, even in broad daylight: and their terrors were augmented, by traditions of "many a foul and midnight murder," which, in "the oulden times," had glutted the savage tyrants of this wide domain.

Such was the place in which, according to the account delivered by the black spirit, the "*unfortunate woman*" was concealed.

The distance of Rosemont from the hermit's cell, was about four or five miles —the hill, from whose summit Merlin had seen the distressed person, was about a mile northward from the ruins of the castle, and nearer the hermitage.

The events of the night had occasioned Devereux to forget his maladies, until his physician, Merlin, reminded him that the cold-bath, and the herbs which had been

given him, must be repeated daily. However, as the business which now occupied the attention of every one at Mordeford Castle, was paramount to every other consideration, Devereux easily excused himself from following Merlin's prescriptions for a few days.

Sir Humphrey attempted to prevail on the hermit to accompany them on their intended search, in his new dress; but this he positively refused; and therefore again equipped himself in the party-coloured vest, the fanciful hat, and clumsy sandals, which, he said, that he had now worn for forty years.

Very early in the morning the company set forward; and lest they should meet with enemies to encounter, in the wild and savage *tenants* of the ruins of Rosemont, or "*men*, more savage and more wild than they," Bohun ordered several of his servants to attend them, with pikes and bows.

Devereux, whose youth and activity admirably qualified him for such an undertaking,

taking, was dressed as a bowman, had a quiver of arrows at his back, and a light spear in his hand.

The knights were girded with their swords, and each of them also carried a spear.

Merlin had his usual staff—and encouraged by his dependance on the prophetic spirit of his invisible friend, when accoutred for the expedition, approached Lady Bolebec, with an air much more like that of a courtier than a recluse of the forest, and, with equal respect and gallantry, bade her rely on the goodness of Providence, for the result of this day's enquiry —which, if it did not restore her infant to her arms, would, in all probability, at least clear up the mystery in which his absence had been hitherto involved, and must therefore be productive of consolation, if not of happiness.

Joy lighted up the countenance of the old man—and he declared that he had not, for many years, experienced so delicious a

moment, as that which now promised to render him useful to his fellow-creatures.

Arriving at the hermitage, Merlin shewed the company the pitcher, out of which the unknown person had been supplied with milk; and the pallet on which he was lying down to repose, when the black spirit first whispered in his ear; and pointed out the respective situations which the invisible had seemed to occupy, at his different visits.

Among the pebbles at the brink of the spring, were still lying some of the pieces of money, which the hermit had scornfully thrown away; for such was the veneration in which the old man was held, for his temperance, wisdom, and sanctity, that not one of the neighbouring peasants, who were perpetually resorting to the hermitage to receive his instructions, however distressed, would have dared to make free with any thing which they supposed to belong to him.

These he pointed out to Sir Humphrey, but

but particularly to Devereux, whom he seemed to regard as the leader of the expedition. From the hermitage they proceeded to the hill, and placing themselves on the summit, Merlin directed their attention to the projecting rock, which they found exactly accordant with his description.

Sir Hugh de Bolebec, whose parental feelings reluctantly yielded to any delay, would have pressed forward instantly towards the spot where the hermit had lost sight of the woman and child; but Merlin forcibly pulled him back, and insisted upon it, that Devereux should first enter the narrow passage amongst the rocks.

Devereux grasped his spear in his hand, and, followed by Sir Hugh, entered the aperture which, with difficulty, admitted him in a stooping posture. Merlin proposed to follow, but Sir Humphrey Bohun prevailed upon him to remain at the entrance. Two of the servants followed Sir

Hugh de Bolebec—the others remained with their master and the hermit, at the mouth of the cave.

One of these, who had climbed up among the rocks which commanded a view of Rosemont Castle, thought he descried, in a deep valley, about midway between the hill and the ruins, some person among the trees; but the morning mist rendered every object obscure, and he was undetermined whether he should mention it to Sir Humphrey or not.

He kept his eyes fixed on the spot, until, at length, being convinced that his sight had not deceived him, he requested Sir Humphrey Bohun to ascend to the place.

Bohun, however, could not distinguish the object which the man described, and the fog seemed rather to increase. He was unwilling to excite false hopes in the mind of his friend Bolebec, which was already too much upon the stretch, but directed

rected the servant to mark the spot as well as he could, that they might examine it on their way to the ruins.

Devereux and Sir Hugh were not long in completing this part of their search: The passage by which they had entered the rock conducted them into a kind of natural grotto, which opened upon a projecting ledge, from which there was a precipitous descent of at least fifty feet. This opening presented a chearful view of the adjacent country, but was itself hidden from observation, by craggy portions of solid stone, which seemed to have been disturbed from their original bed, by some great convulsion of nature. Brilliant spar hung in clusters from the roof of the grotto, and, in some places, overspread the sides of it like vast sheets of ice.

The place had no appearance of ever having been inhabited; nor was there any indication that the hand of man had at all contributed to its formation: its builder was evidently the great architect of Na-

sure; and its foundations appeared to have been laid with those of "the everlasting hills."

Sir Humphrey Bohun now proposed that the party should divide: Sir Hugh de Bolebec, Devereux, and two of the servants, proceeding directly to the ruins; whilst Merlin, himself, and the rest of the company, took a circuitous route through the valley. But Merlin would no longer, on any account, be separated from Devereux, and therefore attended close at his side, like as Mentor did Telemachus; so that Bohun was compelled to exchange the hermit for another of the attendants; and this point settled, the two parties agreed to meet on the outside of Rosemont Castle.

Sir Humphrey and his attendants descended the hill with alacrity, and soon reached the corner of the wood, where the servant thought that he had perceived some person among the trees. Here they found an old man busily employed in gathering herbs.

As

As soon as he perceived their approach, he attempted to conceal himself among the trees; but finding that his age and weakness deprived him of all chance of escaping pursuit, he threw down his bundle of vegetables, and falling on his knees before Bohun, intreated him, in the most pathetic tone, to do him no harm.

Sir Humphrey desired him to rise, and assured him that they had no intention to injure him. Perceiving, however, from his confusion, that there was something of mystery about his appearance, at that unfrequented spot, so early in the morning, Bohun suspected that he might be able to give him some intelligence respecting the objects of their search; and, therefore, taking advantage of his fears, he told him that the object of their visit, was to make some enquiries respecting a person supposed to have been concealed at Rosemont, and that he must insist on receiving a direct answer to his questions.

The trembling old man clasped his hands

together with great fervour, again besought his protection, and assured Sir Humphrey that he would conceal nothing from him.

Bohun then enquired what was become of the young woman and child, who had been for some time concealed among the rocks?

"Alas!" replied the old man, "if this unfortunate woman be the object of your search, it will be unavailing, for she has been taken away from me, and carried I know not whither."

"Old man," said Sir Humphrey, sternly, "do not attempt to deceive me—there is not a thicket in this forest, nor a recess among these rocks, which I will not cause to be strictly searched; and if you tell me a falsehood, not even your grey hairs shall protect you from the severest punishment."

"Good, my Lord," said the old man, tears gushing from his eyes while he spoke, "did I not promise to tell you the truth, and

and what interest can I now have to disguise it? Did I not preserve her life, at the hazard of my own? Have I not, for her sake, increased the evils of poverty, and endangered the existence of those whose safety is dearer to me than my own? Would to Heaven that I knew the place to which she has been removed! for, oh! what anguish must a parent feel, torn, in her last moments, from her helpless infant!"

"Where is the infant?" interrupting him with eagerness, said Sir Humphrey.

"The infant was this morning safe in my cottage," replied the old man.

"Conduct us thither this moment," said Bohun.

The emotion with which these words were spoken threw the old man into an extacy of the most poignant grief.—"You will not, surely, deprive me of the child!" said he. "Cruel, cruel man! is it not enough that thy barbarous orders have snatched from me the opportunity of comforting the last moments of the penitent

tent and unfortunate mother, but must the lovely infant also be the victim of thine insatiable malevolence? No! rather will I bare my aged bosom to thy spear, than willingly contribute to bring misery on the little innocent."

"What means this frenzy?" said Bohun; "be composed, father! some explanation may be requisite; but be assured, that our object is the safety of the child, and that you will be amply rewarded for contributing to it."

The old man a little recovered himself. —"Heaven's will be done!" said he; "it is useless for a feeble old man to resist your pleasure; but, at least, forgive the earnestness with which he would preserve from harm an innocent babe, whom Providence seems to have entrusted to him."

"My good friend," replied the knight, "whosoever you are, you cannot long have inhabited this part of the country, without hearing of Sir Humphrey Bohun; that is my name, and I am persuaded that your

your fears of being treated with cruelty or injustice will subside, on knowing who it is that converses with you."

The old man again fell on his knees, and intreated pardon for the suspicions he had entertained.—"But, indeed, Sir Knight," said he, "I had so little expectation of seeing any one in this solitude, that on your first coming to me, I hardly knew what I said; and when you desired to be conducted to the child, I naturally supposed that you must be the man whose presence I had the most reason to dread."

"Who is that person?" said Bohun.

"I do not know his name," replied the old man, "nor have I ever seen him; but if you are, indeed, Sir Humphrey Bohun, I will relate all I know of this mysterious affair."

"Conduct us, in the mean time, towards your habitation," said Sir Humphrey.

The old man led the way—and as they proceeded, informed Bohun that he was

the

the father of two sons, who, having unfortunately fallen into vicious courses, had, at length, enlisted themselves into a banditti of robbers, who infested the marshes of Wales; that the disgrace and infamy of their conduct having almost broken his heart, his wife, himself, and an only daughter, had packed up a few utensils for domestic purposes, and driving before them a few goats and sheep, which, with two she-asses, constituted their whole property, left that part of the country in which they had once lived in credit and comfort, and sought an asylum where they were unknown.

In passing through the wild track which lay to the south of Holme-wood, Rosemont Castle engaged their attention; and the solitude of the place, and the immense extent of uncultivated country around it, induced them to take up their abode among the ruins, where, with some of the materials of the fallen buildings, they had constructed a rude habitation, just capable of sheltering

sheltering them from the storms, and giving security to their nightly slumbers.

They had built their hut in the very centre of the ruins, an area of considerable extent, being enclosed by the broken walls. Here they remained uninterrupted, save by the depredations of the wolf, who, in spite of their utmost vigilance, made frequent havoc of their little flock. The old man soon understood, that the superstitious prejudices of the inhabitants of the neighbouring district prevented them from approaching the ruins of Rosemont; and this circumstance, added to his precaution to avoid any intercourse with them, occasioned him to remain uninterrupted for nearly two years; when, one night, as the old man was about to close the hatch that secured the path leading to his humble dwelling, three men, suddenly rushing from among the bushes, with which the ruins were every where closely surrounded, seized hold of him, and threatened

threatened him with death if he made any noise.

He had sufficient presence of mind to recollect, that as no one was acquainted with the place of his residence, it was very improbable that this attack should have been premeditated; and, therefore, with as much fortitude as he could summon to his assistance, enquired who they were, and what they wanted?

"We want," said one of the villains, "a night's lodging in your cottage—but first you must promise not to betray us."

The terror of the old man was now increased, for it was the voice of his own son which thus addressed him. Trembling in every joint, he told them that he would conduct them to his hut. Two of them accompanied him, the third remained at the wicket.

The scene which followed, it would be difficult to describe. The astonishment and distress of the old couple, and the

struggles

struggles of natural affection, intermixed with virtuous resentment and indignation, on the one hand, and on the other, the terrors of conscience, added to the confusion and embarrassment of so unexpected a rencontre, were perhaps scarcely ever paralleled.

The old man wept, when he related this part of his story; but being urged to proceed by Bohun, who was impatient to hear of the child, although unwilling to interrupt so interesting a narrative, went on to state, that the first transports of grief, anger, and astonishment, being over, his sons joined in assuring him that their unexpected visit to Rosemont was not, as he suspected, in consequence of any intention to commit a robbery, nor were they engaged on a predatory excursion, but employed by a person of great consequence, in an undertaking for which they were to be well rewarded; and in proof of it, shewed him a paper of instructions, by which it appeared that they were intrusted with

with the conveyance of a woman and child to some safe and secret retreat, where they were ordered to use the utmost vigilance, to prevent the possibility of her abode being discovered: that thinking it necessary to travel by roads the least frequented, and recollecting that the ruins of Rosemont might afford a temporary retreat, had directed their steps that way; and that their meeting with him was entirely accidental, as he must perceive, by the surprise which he must have observed when they came into his hut.

The old man said, that without knowing what degree of credit was due to their statement, he felt himself in a situation equally incapable of resisting their importunity, or of defending himself from the consequences of their resentment: that moreover, considering a refusal to comply with their wishes, might not only endanger the loss of his few remaining comforts, but perhaps bring destruction on the unfortunate woman in their custody, he had consented

consented to her being received into his cottage.

Previous to her admission, however, the young men extorted from their parents a solemn promise not to enquire into any particulars respecting the woman or child, besides those which she might be disposed voluntarily to communicate; and they, in return, assured him, that instead of being burthensome to him, they would take care to provide amply for her sustenance, as well as their own; and that the old man should partake of the reward which had been promised to them by their employer; but who their employer was, or whence the strangers came, they were bound by an oath not to communicate to any one.

The old man related that the woman and child were then brought into the cottage, having waited near the spot where he had been attacked in the manner before mentioned; that she appeared to be in a very weak state of health, and frequently shed tears; but neither on her arrival, nor

at

at any time afterwards, disclosed her name or condition.

His sons at first informed him that they expected to receive orders, in a short time, to convey her to some other place of abode; but after she had been at Rosemont a few weeks, her health daily declining, they said no more about her removal. At length, their conversation becoming more and more reserved, he was induced to listen to the discourse which they held with each other; and thus learned that the person by whose orders they had conducted the woman to Rosemont, had left the country, and could not be found. However, so great was their reliance on his promises, that they resolved to remain faithful, believing, as one of them expressed it, (not at all supposing that he was overlooked) that the only way of saving themselves, would be by taking care of the child, as that would enable them to make terms at any time, either with one party or the other.

The

The old man said that he did not perfectly understand this; but from the secrecy of the parties, he supposed that the woman had probably forsaken her friends for the sake of her lover, and that he had now abandoned her in turn: however, as she seemed sedulously to avoid any disclosure, he strictly adhered to the promise which he had given to his sons, not to agitate any enquiry into the affair: that one of the associates always remained at Rosemont, but the other two were sometimes absent during several days together. His eldest son, who was the most constant resident at the cottage, used to absent himself occasionally by night, and commonly returned with provisions, which he always assured the old man were honestly procured, being, as he said, either fairly purchased of the neighbouring cottagers, or obtained from those whose affluence enabled them to contribute such assistance gratuitously: but the old man said, that he himself

himself did not at all know whether this account could be depended upon.

About a week ago, the two men who had been for some time absent, and, as their companion informed the old man, were gone into a distant part of the country, returned to the ruins. They arrived there in the evening, appearing gloomy and dejected; and after some time spent in conversation with their companion, they all went out together.

One of them soon came back again, and desired to speak with the woman, who immediately accompanied him out at the door of the cottage; and they descended the steps leading towards the wicket. As the poor creature was in so weak a condition that she did not appear able to walk far, the old man and his family were surprised that she did not return; and after about an hour, proceeded to look after her, but in vain; and from that time to the present, had neither seen nor heard of either her or the men.

The

The child was left fast asleep in the cottage, and the old man said, that his wife and himself had cherished it with the utmost care.

CHAP. II.

They had now nearly reached the ruins of Rosemont; Bolebec and Devereux had arrived there before them, and were endeavouring to discover some path by which they might approach nearer to the ruins; but every one of the entrances appeared to be choaked up with fragments of the fallen building, or guarded by an impenetrable barrier of thorns and bushes.

On that side where the walls were most decayed, a deep and open pit, out of which were dug the materials that had served to

construct the edifice, intervened to obstruct the progress of intruders; and the tracks that had been made by foxes, and other wild animals, were the only paths which could be discerned.

The frankness of Bohun, and his conciliating manner, had so won upon the old shepherd's mind, that he had laid aside his fears, and considered the strangers in the light of friendly visitors, who might benefit, but certainly were not disposed to injure him.

However, at the sight of a second company, amidst the recesses of that retirement, in which he had remained for two whole years, without seeing any human being approach the spot, his apprehensions began to revive; he cast a look of distrust on Sir Humphrey Bohun, and was seized with another fit of trembling.

Bohun again told him not to be afraid, informed him that the persons he saw were also friends; and then explained, that there were strong reasons for believing that

that the child, at present under his protection, had been stolen from his parents.

The old man lifted up his hands in silent astonishment, never, as he solemnly declared, having entertained any such suspicion; but from the affectionate manner in which the woman had always treated the infant, naturally concluding that it was her own child; and attributing her sudden departure to compulsion, was divided between the pity he felt for the distress of the supposed mother, the dread of some atrocious act, some deed of horror having been committed by his depraved sons and their companion, and his solicitude for the future support of the unfortunate orphan, thus left to the ineffectual care of a feeble old man, worn out by length of days and accumulated sorrows.

Bohun presented the old man to Sir Hugh de Bolebec, who was scarcely less agitated by the hope which his presence

kindled, than was the shepherd by the doubts and uncertainty of which, notwithstanding the repeated assurances of Bohun, he was still unable to divest himself.

Merlin, whose grotesque appearance had contributed to increase the astonishment, if not the apprehensions, of the old shepherd, now approached. The wildness of his eye, his austerity of countenance, and extraordinary habit, rendered him an object, at least, of awe; and the poor shepherd, who had undauntedly braved all the spectres which superstition had enthroned among the ruins of Rosemont, even in the very centre of their pandemonium, could not conceal a sort of shivering horror, at the stern and imposing manner of the hermit; which, amidst all the ludicrous accompaniments of his fanciful dress, betokened him a being scarcely human.

Merlin, who, throughout the whole of the search, was anxiously expecting either the manifestation of the black spirit, or,

at

at least, some proof of his accompanying influence, could not help associating the idea of the invisible, with every thing he saw in this wilderness, approached the old shepherd, and demanded if *the black spirit of the Wye* had, of late, visited Rosemont?

The nature of the question, and the appearance of him who made the enquiry, were equally calculated to confound the already terrified shepherd; and he gazed upon the hermit in silence, unable to articulate a reply.

Bohun told Merlin, that he should be satisfied on that head presently; and begged the old shepherd to shew them the way to his cottage.

In order to arrive at it, they were compelled to pass through a kind of rugged arch, formed by some large stones, which, having casually fallen upon each other, left a narrow opening between them.

In this very spot it was, that the robbers, together with the woman and child, had

taken shelter, on the night when they first came to Rosemont; and here, unexpectedly perceiving the old man who had come to fasten his wicket, seized hold of him, in the manner which he had described to Sir Humphrey Bohun.

Never had the brave Bolebec, in the numerous battles and sieges in which he had been engaged, rushed forward with so much eager impetuosity, to obtain that glory which is the soldier's meed, and for which he himself had, a thousand times, undauntedly risqued his life, as that with which he this day mounted the rugged path to Rosemont Castle, whose mouldering walls now enclosed the hopes of his family and name.

The youthful Devereux followed; and being come within the enclosure of the ruins, the old man opening the door of his cottage, the first object which presented itself to their sight was the lovely Edward, sleeping on a pallet of rushes, whilst the shepherd's

shepherd's daughter, sitting by his side, watched his tranquil slumbers.

Alarmed at the approach of the strangers, the poor girl gave an involuntary shriek; and the infant opening his fine blue eyes, stretched out his little hand, as if ready to meet the embrace of his fond and anxious parent, who caught him to his bosom, with emotions of such exquisite sensibility, that no language can possibly describe them.

The child, although at present too young to have imbibed any other idea of affection, excepting that which nature has fixed intuitively in the mind, and is almost coeval with the existence of every created being, smiled unconscious of the scene in which he was so deeply interested; and heightened, by the beautiful simplicity of innocence, the effect produced upon the group of admiring spectators.

Bohun could scarcely contain himself for joy. Devereux alternately kissed the child, and congratulated his friend, who

still folded the little Edward in his fond embrace, as if afraid that he should again be deprived of him.

The cottagers, scarcely satisfied with the reality of the scene before them, were one moment animated by the liveliest joy, and the next, depressed by doubts and apprehensions.

Merlin, although he participated in the general delight of Sir Hugh de Bolebec, Devereux, and his friend Bohun, felt in some degree disappointed, that the discovery had not more immediately depended upon the agency of Devereux, whom he had, all along, believed to be expressly deputed by the black spirit, for the elucidation of the mystery.

Thinking, however, that his notion of invisible agency was now sufficiently established, he scarcely allowed himself time to receive the thanks of Bolebec, for the important service derived from his assistance, but turning to Sir Humphrey Bohun, with

with an air of triumph, gravely removing his cap at the same time, "I hope, Sir Knight," said he, "if my arguments could not convert you to my opinion, that, at least, my proofs have been satisfactory?"

The worthy Bohun, who was always equally pleased with the simplicity of poor Merlin, and delighted with his sincerity, replied; "Merlin, I confess myself unable to account for this extraordinary affair; but as I am unwilling to suffer credulity to lead me into extravagant notions, you must allow me still to doubt; and when we get back to Mordeford, I have much to say, both to you and your friend, the Earl of Hereford, on this subject."

"Nothing that will convince either of us, I believe," replied Merlin; "however, if you have any counter *proofs*, Sir Humphrey, we will not object to your producing them."

Bohun smiled. Merlin thinking that this would be a proper opportunity, for renewing his enquiries respecting the

black spirit, requested Devereux to call the shepherd aside for that purpose; having observed, that the old man was so much scared by his appearance, that he was before really incapable of giving him any answer.

Devereux, who was scarcely less astonished than Merlin himself, at the inexplicable manner in which this discovery had been brought about, assured the old shepherd that he had nothing to fear from the hermit, who was so desirous of making this enquiry, and entreated him to afford the most explicit information in his power.

Merlin again enquired, if he had never been visited by the black spirit?

The shepherd replied, that he had never even heard of such a person.

"It is no person," hastily interrupted Merlin; "it is an invisible being, whose voice is heard frequently in whispers, and sometimes more audibly."

The shepherd assured him that he had

had never met with any thing of the kind.

"How came the child at your cottage?" said Merlin; who not having heard the shepherd's story, knew nothing of the circumstances which had been related by him to Sir Humphrey Bohun.

On being informed of the particulars, and observing, that in the old man's account of the affair, he had mentioned that, besides his two sons, there was another person concerned in bringing the woman and child to Rosemont ruins, he became very anxious to obtain some farther information about the stranger. When he found that the shepherd was unable to afford him any intelligence on that head, Merlin was at first inclined to imagine that he had recognized the black spirit embodied, in the person of this stranger; but being told that there was nothing extraordinary in his behaviour, or different from that of other men, his conjectures were again set afloat.

They were now joined by Bohun, who enquired of the shepherd, what provisions had been usually brought to the ruins, for the support of the woman and child? He replied, that they consisted chiefly of bread, milk, and vegetables; with sometimes a few roots, and once or twice a little fruit.

"And who brought them? said Merlin, with great earnestness.

"My son," replied the old shepherd.

"Are you quite sure of it?" continued Merlin.

On being told that it had been his regular custom to quit the ruins in the dusk of the evening, and to return in the course of the night, with the provisions he had collected, nay, farther, that the milk was brought in a large earthen pitcher or crock, "Merlin," said Sir Humphrey, "what think you of incorporeal agency, and the black spirit now?"

The idea of the invisible was, however, too deeply implanted in the mind of the hermit,

mit, to be easily eradicated; and although he was not able to disprove the assertions of the shepherd, and scarcely knew how to suggest a doubt about them, he was not the more inclined to relinquish his own opinion; for he was as confident respecting the accuracy of every thing he had related about the voice, as he was of his own existence.

Whilst Bohun and the hermit were thus employed in comparing the testimony of the old man with the account of the invisible, the one with a view to obtain some clue to the farther detection of the plot, and the other, for the purpose of demonstrating his proposition respecting incorporeal intercourse, and triumphing over, what he considered, the scepticism of Sir Humphrey, the old woman and her daughter were repeating to Sir Hugh de Bolebec the same unvarnished tale which the old man had already related to Bohun; —he, in return, satisfying their curiosity, with an account of the circumstances under

der which the child was carried away from Glandon Tower, and the disappointment of all his efforts to recover his lost Edward, with the almost miraculous manner in which he had been at length traced to Rosemont ruins.

It yet remained to determine, whether any, or what steps, could be pursued to acquire some information respecting the fate of Agnes; and to discover the authors of this villainous and deep-laid scheme, by which the happiness of a whole family had been so long interrupted, and threatened with irretrievable destruction.

It might be naturally supposed, that the ruffians, whatsoever were their motives for so suddenly removing Agnes, (for from the description given by the shepherd's wife, there could be no doubt of her identity, although evidently altered by the influence of disease, since her having left Glandon Tower) would return to Rosemont, on account of the child.

Their

Their object, however, at present undiscoverable, could not be accomplished without it. They had acknowledged to one another, that their own safety might depend on the preservation of the infant; they had said, that it would "*enable them to make terms at any time*;" and if any thing could be understood from this expression, it must assuredly lead to a conclusion, that nothing but unavoidable necessity could induce them altogether to abandon the child, on whose preservation it was evident that they thought themselves principally, if not wholly dependent, for the reward which had been promised them.

Bolebec and Sir Humphrey Bohun endeavoured to concert a plan for the more perfect elucidation of this mysterious affair; and in the interim, Devereux, with one of the attendants, set out for Mordeford Castle, to relieve the anxiety of Lady Bolebec, and prepare her mind for an event, which, suddenly and incautiously announced, might be productive of the

most serious consequences; the influence of joy being even more powerful than that of any other passion of the mind.

Who can describe the doubts and fears, the anxious hope, and melancholy anticipation of disappointment, which alternately agitated the bosom of the Lady Bolebec, whilst Sir Hugh, with Bohun and Devereux, were gone in search of her lost darling!

Devereux scarcely suffered his feet to touch the ground, so speedily did he hasten towards Mondeford Castle.

The Lady Bolebec and Isabella, wearied with anxiously looking for the arrival of intelligence, and having exhausted their imagination in fruitless conjectures, respecting the event of their search, had descended from the leads of the Castle, and retired to their apartments. The greater part of the morning had been consumed in unsuccessful endeavours to realize the hopes which every movement among the fleecy tenants of the opposite

bank

bank of the river, and the appearance of every herdsman or cottager resorting to the neighbouring stream, had excited.

Nor was the anxiety which distracted the mind of Lady Bolebec, confined to her own breast. Besides the affectionate sympathy of Isabella, every one about the Castle partook of the hopes and fears which alternately soothed and agitated the maternal bosom.

They were continually upon the look-out, in expectation of the return of some of the party; and knowing that the Lady Bolebec had retired into the Castle, redoubled their vigilance, each in hopes of becoming the messenger of some agreeable intelligence.

An ancient female servant, who, having been brought up in the family, had acquired a sort of pre-eminence among the domestics, on that account, was amongst the most active on this occasion.

She had, indeed, few cares of her own, and but little business to attend to—her

chief

chief employment being to shew the different apartments of the Castle to casual visitors, and those whom curiosity attracted to inspect it: but on this occasion, she would have closed the doors even against those who might have desired to unlock them with a golden key, rather than lose the gratification of being the first to announce an event, which she sometimes boldly averred was little less than certain; although, whenever the rest of the family were equally sanguine, in the expression of their hopes, that the search would be successful, she seldom failed to give herself credit for being possessed of more caution, than to assent hastily to such improbable expectations; and was very sorry that her master, Sir Humphrey Bohun, should suffer himself to be imposed upon by *a mad hermit*.

The reading of Agatha had not, probably, informed her, that the chivalrous spirit of that period, founded on the crusades, owed its origin to the very influ-

ence

ence which she so much despised; and that all Europe and the world, were excited to take up arms, by the fanatical preaching of Peter the Hermit, who seemed to diffuse a double portion of his mad spirit upon those who became his disciples and followers.

Agatha, who had begun to look for the return of Sir Humphrey Bohun, long before it was possible for him to have accomplished half his journey, and was incessantly employed in going up stairs and down, to reconnoitre from the different windows, all the approaches by which it was either probable or improbable that a messenger might arrive, at length descried a person running along the opposite bank of the river, in the greatest apparent haste. She saw him seizing a coracle which lay on the beach—he jumped into it, and immediately paddled across, in a direction nearly parallel with the garden-gate of the Castle.

Delighted at the thought of obtaining

the

the desired intelligence, not only before it had been communicated to the household, but without any suspicion on the part of the rest of the servants, who did not appear to have observed the man, she hastened to the water's edge, and beckoning the man to follow her, on his coming into the hall, "Well, friend," said she, "and when may we expect this little stranger?"

"Very soon now, Madam, they tell me," said the clown.

"And where is the woman?" continued Agatha, (who had obtained ever particle of the hermit's story, from the Lady Bolebec's waiting-woman, and had fixed it in her memory, by repeating it over and over again fifty times in the course of the day).

"She is at neighbour Fairgood's cottage," replied the fellow; "do pray, Madam, step and see her yourself; they say she is very ill."

"I will go this moment," said Agatha; and

and then setting before the man a flaggon of cider, and a loaf and cheese, told him to regale himself; but desired that he would not, on any account, mention one word of what he had said to her, nor whither she was gone, until her return.

She hastened, with as much expedition as she could, to the cottage, expecting that she should thus have the satisfaction, not only of being the first to announce the return of little Edward, but actually bring him to his mother.

Thus do those who are inconsiderately eager in any pursuit, often outstrip even the speed of time, by flying on the wings of imagination. The old woman never stopped to reflect on the improbability, that a stranger would be sent with intelligence respecting the child, when there were no less than six servants in attendance upon this occasion, besides Sir Hugh de Bolebec, Bohun, Devereux, and the hermit; nor to enquire why, instead of coming directly home to Mordeford Castle, they

they should have stopped at Fairgood's cottage. Thither, however, she hastened; but how great was her disappointment and vexation, when, instead of Edward and his nurse, on entering the apartment, she found a cottager's wife, surrounded by the neighbours, at the point of presenting them with *a little stranger*, whom they had for some time expected, with as much anxiety as that which Agnes had felt on account of young Bolebec.

Whilst Agatha was gone to the cottage, Devereux and his servant made their appearance on the brow of the hill, where they were immediately recognized from the Castle. Descending to the bank of the stream, that washed the lofy eminence on which Mordeford Castle stood, they shouted repeatedly, in such a manner as not only to announce their arrival, but to convey an intimation that they were the bearers of good news.

The Lady Bolebec being immediately apprized of the return of Devereux, and full

of

of anxious hope, descending the staircase, in haste, to meet him, encountered the enraged and disappointed Agatha, on her return from Fairgood's cottage.

The old woman, who at present knew nothing of the return of Devereux, was too much occupied by her own disappointment to observe much ceremony, immediately began—"Oh, my dear Lady! was ever any thing so provoking! after straining my eyes from my head, until I am half blind, hurrying up stairs and down, and from one window to another, till I can scarcely crawl, not one morsel of meat within these precious lips all the live-long day, to be disappointed at last, and all by a stupid, ignorant, blundering rustic! But I will punish him, I'll warrant, before he leaves this Castle. However, do not be cast down, pray, my dear good Lady! for depend upon it, we shall have good news presently."

Thus ran on the antiquated housekeeper, till she was out of breath, whilst the Lady Bolebec,

Bolebec, scarcely able to support the agitation of her spirits, and applying all that Agatha had said to the arrival of some person who had been mistaken for Devereux, was only prevented from sinking to the floor by the attendants, who, having already understood from Devereux that the child was discovered, were crowding in a body to offer the effusions of their grateful hearts, in testimony of the interest which they felt, in an event so important to the happiness of their benignant patroness.

Devereux was already on the stairs, and respectfully approaching, announced to the Lady Bolebec the recovery of the lost Edward, and that he had left him safe in his father's arms.

The venerable Earl of Hereford exerted his friendly efforts, to prepare the mind of Lady Bolebec for the affecting interview; and the attendants seemed to vie with each other, in expressing their sincerity of joy on the occasion.

Agatha,

Agatha, who had only been diverted from her intention of punishing the involuntary offence of the cottager, by the confusion which the arrival of Devereux, at that instant, had occasioned, still felt so much chagrined at her double disappointment, that she vowed vengeance against the rustic; and was only prevented from laying violent hands upon him, by the simplicity of his explanation of the mistake, which excited so much merriment among the domestics, whose hearts, expanding with joy, were properly fitted for the effect of harmless raillery, that the antiquated virgin was fairly laughed out of countenance.

CHAP. III.

The old shepherd and his wife expressed so much satisfaction at the restoration of Edward to his father, that the obligation which Sir Hugh at present thought himself under, for their tenderness and humanity towards the infant, was even increased by it.

Bolebec offered them his immediate protection; and promised the exertion of all his influence, to endeavour to reclaim their unfortunate sons from their vicious habits and connexions. He told them, that he would amply provide for them, during the remainder of their days; that they should

should be at liberty to reside within the walls of his Castle, or that he would present them with a comfortable dwelling, and land sufficient to support them, in any part of his estate.

The honest old couple fell on their knees, and with tears of gratitude, besought the blessings of Heaven upon Sir Hugh, his family, and the little infant.

Bohun advised the immediate removal of the shepherd, his wife, and daughter, lest they should suffer any injury from the resentment of the men, who, when they came back in quest of the child, might perhaps wreak the vengeance of their disappointment on their wretched parents; but it was feared, that unless the shepherd remained at the ruins, there would be no farther chance afforded of tracing Agnes to her present concealment, nor of elucidating the still mysterious circumstance of the original loss of the child.

It was therefore concluded upon, that the old man and his family should still re-

main on the spot, and that a daily intercourse should be kept up with Sir Humphrey Bohun, who promised to send his servants every morning to Rosemont, to learn whether the old man's sons were returned. The shepherd was moreover directed to assure the young men, that they should be protected from any evil consequences which they might apprehend, from making a farther disclosure respecting the person who had employed them, provided they would convey, through the old shepherd, any intelligence of Agnes, or any account (if they were acquainted with it) of the plan by which Edward de Bolebec had been originally taken away from Glandon Tower.

The whole company were now about to depart for Mordeford Castle, when the daughter of the poor cottager attracted the attention of every one, by her shrieks and cries, at the prospect of losing Edward, to whom she had acted as a nurse, almost ever since his arrival at the ruins; first

first on account of the indisposition of Agnes, and afterwards from the pure feelings of regard and attachment.

When Bolebec understood the cause of her distress, he immediately told her, that, if it would make her happy, and her father and mother consented, she should accompany the child to Mordeford Castle, and either return to them the next day, or else remain there until their own removal was determined upon. The poor people readily consented—and the old man very sensibly observed, that the absence of Rebecca would convince his sons, if they should return to the ruins, that he did not deceive them with regard to the removal of the child.

Neither Sir Humphrey Bohun, nor any of the party, had yet broken their fast, so that they were anxious to return without farther delay. The only provisions in the shepherd's cottage, were a few oaten cakes and a little milk; a pretty equal distribution of this humble fare was made among

the company, without respect of persons; and they were at length prepared for their departure, when Merlin started a new proposal, in order to explain the mystery in which the loss of the child was still involved, and to arrive at more certainty respecting the black spirit:—this was, that he should remain at the ruins, and await the return of the robbers.

He was perfectly satisfied, in his own mind, that he should not incur any personal danger; and such was his perfect indifference to every thing which concerned his own life, that if he had imagined himself to be exposed to the most imminent rique, that consideration would have had no influence in deterring him from his proposed scheme.

The hermit hoped that the black spirit might be induced to renew his visits, (particularly as he took the pains of thus following him,) and he told Sir Humphrey Bohun, that he had determined to come to an explanation with him, although the undertaking

dertaking should require the courage of St. Dunstan.

However, both Sir Hugh de Bolebec and Bohun entertained a very different opinion of the invisible, although they neither could account for his surprising visits, nor would offend Merlin, by the suggestion of any doubts respecting his narrative.

They therefore opposed the hermit's plan, with determined resolution, thinking that it would be useless to expect any farther discovery concerning the black spirit, which, notwithstanding all they had seen and heard, they could not help supposing a mere phantom of Merlin's bewildered brain; and deeming it cruel to expose the good old man to the dangers to which he might be liable, if (as it was highly probable) he should introduce himself to the robbers, as the person who had been principally instrumental in the discovery and consequent removal of the child.

Nature would not interpose that restraint

to which the shepherd was, perhaps, already indebted for his life; and the hermit's dress would have probably been a very poor defence against the violence of the robbers, when enfuriated by the disappointment of "*making terms*" by means of the child.

The gratification which Bolebec now felt in the restoration of his lost Edward, would have been greatly alloyed, by the occurrence of any accident to one who had so much contributed to his present happiness. But it would have been very difficult to have changed the resolution of Merlin, by directly opposing his opinions. Bolebec therefore suggested, that he was desirous of availing himself of the concurrent advice of the Earl of Hereford and himself on this subject, before he adopted any particular plan, and therefore could not think of suffering him to remain at Rosemont; and Sir Humphrey Bohun added, that the Lady Bolebec would naturally desire to see him among her friends

on

on this joyful occasion; "and for my own part," said Bohun, "I think it will be a very bad compliment to the Earl of Hereford and myself, to prefer the company of the black spirit to that of ourselves; unless, indeed, as I begin to suspect, Merlin is not quite prepared for the arguments, with which he has had notice I am ready to combat his notions of the black invisible."

The last observation made a deeper impression than all the rest. Turning very shortly about—"Sir Humphrey," said he, "I have before told you that I was ready to examine your proofs; but with regard to arguments, as you would not allow the force of mine, unless substantiated by evident and demonstrable facts, so neither will the Earl of Hereford or myself concede that to you which you refuse to us. However, to convince you that I want no farther conviction than that which I already feel, I will return to Mordeford Castle."

The party took the nearest course towards the bridge over the Wye, and as they passed within sight of the hermitage, Merlin expressed some anxiety on account of the poor people who usually resorted to him there.—"I dare say," said he, "that they are very uneasy at my absence; but they dare not make any enquiry after me, for I have always so instructed them. However, they must console themselves as well as they can; and if they have been deprived of my advice, in return, I have not been a burthen to them for my support, which is more than every teacher can say."

Sir Hugh de Bolebec carried the young Edward in his arms—Sir Humphrey and the hermit walked on either side, and beguiled the distance of the way, by a discourse, of which the existence or non-existence of the black spirit of the Wye formed the principal subject.

Sir Humphrey contending, that even the circumstances which had happened,

strong

strong and extraordinary as they were, were but very inadequate proofs of the reality of such a personage; and Merlin assuming, that until some explanation could be given of the facts which no one presumed to deny, he was justified in believing that the invisible was one of those influences, which "stalk abroad at midnight," and wander unseen "beneath the moon's pale rays."

The company arrived at Mordeford. The Lady Bolebec, who, in consequence of the interval which had elapsed since the arrival of Devereux at the Castle, had again begun to entertain alarms lest fate should still interpose some obstacle to the happiness which had once more been presented to her expiring hopes, and dash the cup of consolation from her lips, once more beheld her lovely Edward, in all the bloom of health, and laughing sportiveness of innocence.

To those who are parents, no description can be requisite to pourtray the delight

which the fond mother experienced; language is far too feeble to give colouring to such a scene—to such a feast of reason, affection, and joy!

The attainment of this talisman dissipated in a moment the shades of melancholy. Like the vivifying sunbeam shedding its benignant influence upon the drooping flowrets of the early spring, when chilled by the rude blasts of the gloomy north, even so did the return of the lost Edward raise to new life and happiness, his dejected and desponding parents.

The festivities of Mordeford Castle were now without alloy; and the generous heart of Bohun expanded with delight, as he contemplated the happy assembly.

No obstacle now remained, to prevent the return of the Bolebec family to their mansion at Glandon, but the reiterated solicitations of Bohun, that he might be indulged with their company for some time longer, now they were restored to a con-

dition, better adapted than formerly for the enjoyment of social intercourse.

Merlin, who would not on any account be prevented from returning to his hermitage, had, nevertheless, formed so sincere a friendship for the venerable Hereford, that he promised to visit the Castle every day.

Sir Humphrey Bohun had, during the last twenty years, used his utmost efforts to draw him from his cell, and induce him again to join in the circle of civilized life, which he was highly capable of ornamenting; but the old man would never hear of quitting his beloved solitude.

His drink was nothing but water; his food consisted entirely of milk, vegetables, and fruit, with which the neighbouring cottagers amply supplied him; and in return, he assisted them with his counsel, instruction, and advice; illustrating the precepts of the moralist, by the simplicity of his manners, and the benevolence of his life.

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At an early period, he had met with the severest disappointment which a victim of the tender passion could perhaps possibly sustain. In the prime of life, he had paid his addresses to a lovely and amiable woman, equally adorned by personal graces, polished manners, and excellence of disposition. In his progress to her affection, he had encountered all the difficulties which deeply-rooted animosity, between two families of nearly equal rank and opulence, could oppose to the completion of his wishes. At length, having, through "evil report, and good report," triumphed over every obstacle, and manifested himself worthy of so much excellence, by a long course of patient and respectful attention, which, in early times, was considered an essential preparative for the hymeneal state, at the very moment when he had led his lovely blooming bride to the altar, and whilst they were waiting for the nuptial benediction, she fell at his feet a corpse.

The

The shock occasioned by this afflicting event brought on a state of furious derangement. The malady at length subsided into a fixed and settled melancholy; but time, the great physician of the mind, had at last rendered the remembrance of the beloved object of his regard more sweet than painful.

He had fixed his abode on the banks of that favourite stream, which had so often reflected the beautiful image of the departed Angelina. Here he joined his sighs in concert with the zephyrs of the evening, and the murmurs of the crystal stream; or harmless and inoffensive, strayed contemplative among the neighbouring groves.

Never, until the discovery of Edward de Bolebec, to which Merlin had so greatly contributed, had he absented himself from the cell, for so many hours as he had now spent at Mordeford Castle, and in the search in which he had assisted.

The esteem which he seemed to have imbibed for the Earl of Hereford, the regard

gard which he evidently entertained for Devereux, and the gratification which he expressed on having contributed to restore the happiness of the Bolebec family, all concurred to revive in Sir Humphrey Bohun the hope which he had long relinquished, of persuading this unfortunate person to leave his solitary dwelling, and again mix with society.

On every subject, excepting that which directly led to the melancholy recollection of his own misfortunes, the cause of his disease, he was sensible, discreet, and judicious in his observations; and possessed a fund of knowledge, and a flow of eloquence, which were in themselves sufficient to recommend him to the favour of the public, independent of the excellent qualities of his mind, when free from the influence of that particular train of ideas, by which alone it was liable to be hurried into extravagances.

It was remarkable, that although the above account of this eccentric person was

was collected from the observations which he had made from time to time, in conversation with Sir Humphrey Bohun, he had always maintained the strictest secrecy with respect to his name and family; and as he had once or twice appeared to suffer great uneasiness, when an enquiry had been made respecting his connexions, Bohun kindly avoided saying any thing which could lead to unpleasant feelings. He therefore remained in total ignorance of this part of Merlin's history; and could only judge, from his manners and acquirements, that he must have formerly enjoyed the best opportunities of becoming acquainted with all the literature of the age in which he lived, and of being conversant with the superior classes of society.

Sir Hugh de Bolebec entertained a sincere desire to make a suitable return to the hermit, for the benefit derived from his assistance; and he most heartily concurred with his friend Bohun, that, if it were

were possible, they might restore the good old man to the enjoyment of those comforts and appliances of life, from which he had been so long estranged.

With this view they consulted the Earl of Hereford, who, from the ascendancy which he had obtained over the mind of Merlin, seemed the most proper instrument to be employed on such an occasion.

The Earl had been engaged in a discourse with Merlin, on the subject of architectural design, and the effects capable of being produced, by a certain adaptation of scenery to the style and form of particular buildings, and was astonished at the accuracy of discrimination, and elegance of taste, which the hermit had evinced. He could not avoid mentioning it at the time; observing, that these things were not to be met with among the woods and forests of Britain, nor often engaged the attention of his untravelled countrymen.

—"Where

—" Where, my dear friend," added he, " did you acquire this intimacy with what is so little known amongst us?"

Merlin smiled, and replied—" I was not always a hermit; and although for many years, the narrow limits of Holme-wood have held me within its boundary, there was a time, when my roving spirit could scarcely be confined within the world's wide space. You will hardly credit me, my Lord, when I tell you that I was at the battle of Ascalon, with Richard Cœur de Lion, and afterwards rambled almost throughout Europe before I returned to England, where, alas! destiny had prepared for me its cruel scourge!"

The Earl of Hereford perceiving, by a manifest change of countenance, and the faltering of his voice, that his unfortunate friend was now verging on the subject of his troubles, immediately interrupted him, and changed the conversation.

From the information thus almost accidentally dropped, and from the remarks of

Bohun,

Bohun, they were convi[illegible] that the hermit once made a distingu[illegible]ngure in society; but he had so studiously avoided entering into any conversation respecting himself, and always evaded questions indirectly put, with so much dexterity, that there seemed to be little chance of gratifying their curiosity in this p[illegible]rticular, without hazarding his displeasur[illegible] and perhaps the loss of his company.

As the above-mentioned conversation, in which Merlin had spoken of the battle with the Emperor Saladin, was the only one in which he had ever given the least hint respecting himself, during his intercourse with Hereford, the Earl determined to enter upon the business with which he had been entrusted by Sir Hugh de Bolebec and Bohun, by renewing the subject of that conversation.

He therefore took an opportunity, one morning, as they were walking on the terrace at Mordeford Castle, to inform Merlin, that his family seat having fallen to decay,

decay, he had, for a considerable number of years, been employed in the erection of a building, which was entirely formed on his own plans, founded on the experience he had acquired by having visited most of the principal structures which at that period were worthy of attention.

The Earl added, that the building had met with so many interruptions, from the disturbances in the country, and the deficiency of workmen during the war, that he now almost despaired of seeing it completed, before he was summoned to occupy that dark and narrow house, in which the tenant derives no gratification either from elegance of design or magnificence of architecture: but although it was highly probable that he should be compelled to leave the finishing of his plan, to those who were more likely to be interested in it than he was himself, yet a fondness for the employment, and a natural and instinctive desire that the honours of his house might descend through successive generations, had

had encouraged him to persevere in the undertaking. "Now," said he, "nothing would gratify me more, than to have an opportunity of taking your opinion of the execution of my plan—you possess the advantages of a correct taste and strict sincerity, so essential to the character of a critic. Say, my friend, will you refuse to accompany me to Ashbury?"

Merlin, who had of late derived far more satisfaction from the interesting conversation of his new acquaintance, than he had been accustomed to meet with in the solitude of the hermitage, although unprepared for such an invitation, was, secretly, not displeased at it. He hesitated, paused, and sighed.—"It is a long time, my Lord," said he, "since I left off to converse with the world."

"True, my friend," replied the venerable Hereford, laying his hand on the sleeve of Merlin; "but where should we have looked for those principles of science which you possess, and I so much admire and

and value, if the notion had been general, that a total seclusion from the world is consistent with the duties of a social being?"

"There are cases," said Merlin, "in which—"

"I anticipate what you would say," interrupted the Earl; "but we are wandering from the question; and, therefore, I must desire you to confine your answer to this specific proposal—Is there any reason by which you are justified in refusing to my entreaty, the favour of accompanying me to Ashbury, when you know that you can benefit my family, and even the world at large, by the advice which it is in your power to afford me?"

"What will be thought of a man," replied Merlin, "who suffers himself to be seduced from a retirement in which he has wasted the best years of his life; and after having withstood all the temptations and allurements which usually attract the young and gay, if, in his old age, he again mix

in the giddy throng, and again incumber himself with those cares from which he has been so long exempt?"

The Earl perceived that he was gaining ground;—Merlin, like every other person who knows that his own is the weakest side of the argument, had abandoned syllogistic reasoning, for at best a precarious subterfuge. "There can be no difficulty in answering that question," said the Earl: "it will be thought that he has resolved to make the best use he can of the short remainder of his days; that he retired from the world to subdue an excessive attachment to its pleasures and its vanities, at the season when their influence might have been destructive; or, if you please, that he had secluded himself, in order to perfect his philosophy by contemplation, to obliterate impressions which, amidst a continual intercourse among mankind, he might never have been able to remove, and to lay the foundation for a rational enjoyment of virtuous old age, which can never

never be expected among those who, instead of preparing for it as you have done, have exhausted their youth in folly and intemperance; and when they arrive at the years you have now attained, are only in possession of the husks and dregs of existence."

"This must be thought by all those about whose opinions you ought to be solicitous; they will hail your return among them, as nature hails the return of genial spring, and as the earth rejoices at the fructifying showers which nurture its best productions. The delight which you yourself expressed, at the event of the discovery which has so essentially contributed to the happiness of us all, would have convinced me, had I wanted any proof to confirm my opinion, that the principal enjoyment of the life you now lead, centres in the opportunity of diffusing comfort to those around you. The woods variegated by vernal or autumnal tints; the rocks intermingled in wild con-

fusion, and in every different direction, presenting a new combination of imagery to the eye and the mind; the fields enamelled with flowers, or smoothed by the snows of winter; and the varying surface of the river, now gliding along in placid silence, now foaming with augmented strength, and raving with incessant murmurs;—these, and a thousand other natural beauties, may occupy the passing hour, and beguile the wearisomeness of solitude. But I venture to appeal to your own sincerity, whether these are not mere bubbles of ideal pleasure, in comparison with the solid gratification of one charitable, one benevolent action, by which the sum of human happiness is increased; by which the weak are rescued from the oppressions of the powerful, the sick restored to their disconsolate friends, the merit of the humbled raised from neglected obscurity, or the wanderer recalled from his evil way, into the paths of virtue and of peace."

"Enough,

"Enough, my friend," said the hermit, with great emotion; "I am humiliated by the conviction which your remarks have produced. I now feel, that whilst we consider ourselves acting under the influence of a virtuous resolution, we may be sometimes deceived, and betrayed into culpable negligence. Man does not live for himself alone, and his dependence upon others for all his comforts and support, and even for his very existence, ought to guard him from the error into which I have fallen: nor shall your gentle reproof lose its influence—henceforth it shall be my endeavour to make the best use I can of the short remainder of my days, and to expiate, if possible, the inactivity in which I have so long remained an incumbrance of nature, and a drone in the industrious hive of intellectual beings."

CHAP. IV.

THE Earl of Hereford, extremely gratified at the success of his undertaking, told Merlin that it was his intention to set out for Ashbury in a few days. He was desirous of avoiding any unnecessary delay, lest Merlin should suffer his present resolution to be overcome, by the recurrence of his former fondness for Holme-wood and the hermitage; and in order to guard against such an occurrence, took care to obtain a promise from the hermit, that no circumstance should prevent him from fulfilling his engagement.

Merlin consented, with the stipulation, however,

however, that Sir Humphrey Bohun should not be informed of his determination, until the eve of their departure; and having promised to return to Mordeford Castle the next day, actually set out for the hermitage, with a resolution to take a final leave of it.

Several days had now elapsed, and all the intelligence hitherto procured from Rosemont was, that the shepherd had neither seen nor heard of his sons. On the day on which the Earl of Hereford and Merlin had the conversation above related, which terminated in the design of the latter to withdraw himself from the hermitage, the old shepherd came in great haste to Mordeford Castle, and desired permission to speak with Sir Hugh de Bolebec.

The intelligence which he brought was, that the men had returned to Rosemont in the middle of the preceding night. On their arrival, they enquired if the child was safe, and on being answered in the

affirmative, proceeded to inform the old shepherd that they had removed the woman to her relations, and were now come for the infant.

The old man observed, that having, in compliance with their wishes, and the promise they had extorted from him, previous to the admission of the woman and child into his cottage, abstained from making any enquiries into this mysterious affair, he hoped that before they took away the child, they would at least inform him to whom the parties belonged; he thought, that having afforded shelter to them, under his own roof, for so long a time, he had a right to expect this, and was in some measure entitled to it.

They replied, that it could not possibly concern him, to know any thing more of the transaction than that which they had already told him; that there was nothing criminal, as far as related to themselves; that neither the woman nor child belonged to them; and that all they had done was

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in the character of agents to a person who could and would, at a future period, amply reward them for their trouble.

The old man then enquired, whither they meant to remove the child?

They said, he must not expect them to inform him of the name of the place, but it was where the infant would be properly taken care of.—"In short," said his eldest son, "the child has been stolen from his parents; he is the heir of a great family, which has long been at variance with the person who contrived to take him away. Whilst he keeps possession of the child, he has his enemy in his own power; and I dare say he will get enough for his ransom to purchase a good estate."

"And do you think there is no criminality in stealing a child?" said the old man.

"I did not steal him," replied the other; "I never saw the child until several days after he had been taken away; nor did my

brother ever see him till we brought him to Rosemont."

"Would it not be more like honest men," said the old shepherd, "if you were to restore the child to his parents?"

"Perhaps it might," said the youngest, "but that would not answer our purpose so well. It will be soon enough to carry him back again, when he is troublesome to us, or our master forgets our wages."

The old man very seriously exhorted them to return to an honest method of getting their living, and said, that he himself would accompany them to the parents of the child, who, he doubted not, would forgive what was past, on condition of the restoration of their son: but finding all his arguments entirely useless, and despairing of making any impression upon their minds, which seemed to have been rendered callous by a long course of villainy and baseness, he at length told them, that the child had been taken away from Rosemont.

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At first they pretended not to believe his assertion, it being, they said, merely a contrivance, to induce them to promise that they would carry him back to his parents; and instead of finding any confirmation of the old man's story, in the absence of their sister, they considered that circumstance as amounting almost to a positive proof, that the child was still in the ruins of Rosemont, and only hidden from them with the view before hinted at.

They were confirmed in this opinion, because when they asked the old man whither the child had been removed, he, in imitation of their reserve, had said, that *it could not at all concern them to know*; it was sufficient, that he would be *properly taken care of*.

After a long altercation, the old shepherd plainly told them, that unless they would solemnly promise to make known every circumstance of the affair, with the names of those who had been their accomplices, he would not satisfy their curiosity

with regard to the child; but as an inducement to them to disclose the whole, assured them of indemnity for what was past; and a handsome reward, if they would point out the principal persons concerned in the plot.

They asked him numerous questions relative to the removal of the child from Rosemont; but as he persisted in giving no answer, unless he received an assurance that they would discover their accomplices, the investigation terminated in ill-humour and disappointment.

However, the young men declared that they would abide the events of the day, to see whether their sister Rebecca and the child would return or not; and the shepherd left them at his cottage, when he set out for Mordeford Castle.

Bolebec having communicated this intelligence to his friends, they agreed, that as the information already obtained might, by means of Agnes, lead to a complete disclosure of the manner in which Edward

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de Bolebec had been taken away from Glandon Tower, it would be more politic to confine themselves to a trial of the effect of proffered lenity, rather than pursue severer measures towards the young men, who, for any thing that at present appeared, were not concerned in the original plot.

The old shepherd was therefore sent back to Rosemont, with instructions to make a fair and explicit declaration of the circumstances of the removal of the child, by Sir Hugh de Bolebec and Sir Humphrey Bohun, to whom he was to refer his sons, if they presumed any longer to doubt his assertions; and to tell them, that if they were inclined to afford any information respecting the parties actually concerned in stealing the child, it would be the means of securing themselves from the punishment which must necessarily await them, if it should be hereafter discovered that they were accomplices in that nefarious transaction.

Agnes had lived at Glandon Tower, in the capacity of an inferior attendant on the Lady Bolebec's person, for more than two years before the birth of Edward, and had been entrusted with the care of the infant, at her own particular request. She had always manifested the greatest tenderness towards the child; indeed, her conduct in every respect was unexceptionable, and her reputation unblemished. Her parents were poor but honest people, residing in the little village of Hornton, in Oxfordshire, on the verge of Bernwood Forest.

When the Lady Bolebec understood that Agnes was with her relations, (to whom, when she had first been lost from Glandon Tower, a message was immediately sent, but without obtaining any information,) she proposed that a person should be sent to her without delay, to hear from her own mouth an account of this strange affair; and as it appeared to be of importance to acquire some intelligence without delay,

delay, on account of the state of her health, which, if the information of the men who had accompanied her from Rosemont could be depended upon, was, at least, very precarious, her Ladyship's wishes were no sooner announced, than Devereux, ever ready to oblige, immediately undertook to visit the unfortunate Agnes, and return as expeditiously as possible, with all the intelligence he could collect.

Horses were ordered immediately, and Devereux, with two attendants, set out without a moment's delay; determined, although without imparting his intention to any one, to travel night and day, until he arrived at the end of his journey.

He hoped that by so much promptitude, he should prevent the removal of Agnes again, if any such plan should be attempted by the conspirators, in consequence of the disclosure that the old shepherd had been authorised to make, on his return from Mordeford Castle; and that if any

plot

plot of this kind had been contrived by the men, in order to avoid detection, it would thus be prevented.

In the mean time the shepherd returned to Rosemont—but his sons had left the cottage about half an hour before.

They had been very inquisitive of the old woman, to know where their father was gone; and from the uneasiness which they had manifested, it was evident that they did not expect him to return alone. She therefore conjectured, that they were lying in wait somewhere among the ruins, or in the neighbouring wood, and supposed that when they saw him come back alone, they would themselves revisit the cottage: but in this she was disappointed—they came no more to Rosemont.

Such was the information brought to Mordeford Castle, the next day, by Sir Humphrey Bohun's servant, who had been sent as usual to the ruins, to obtain intelligence.

Merlin

Merlin had promised the Earl of Hereford to return to the Castle; and they had agreed to visit a remarkable spot in the vicinage, which had been rendered famous, time immemorial, by the well-known tradition of the Dragon of Mordeford, an amphibious monster, said to have been killed at the confluence of the Wye and the Lug, not far from the Castle.

The day proved remarkably fine, and the Earl had began to feel some degree of impatience at the hermit's delay, not altogether free from an apprehension, that he might have wavered with regard to the resolution of the preceding day.

More than two hours had elapsed beyond the time of their appointment, when Merlin made his appearance.

The Earl perceived in his countenance an indication of mental uneasiness, which gave him the more concern, as he supposed it to have arisen from a reluctance to quit the hermitage, which sentiment, if not effectually removed, would embitter his

his days, wheresoever they might be passed; or even, perhaps, at last occasion the old man to decline his promised visit to Ashbury.

The Earl, however, took no notice of the alteration in his friend's countenance, but gently chiding him for the delay, enquired if the Lady Bolebec were inclined to be of their party?

The hermit, who had been remarkably exact in his personal attentions to her Ladyship, and, indeed, very fond of conversing with her, looked a little uncomfortable, when he found that the party was to be more numerous than he had before expected; and when he understood that Sir Humphrey Bohun also intended to accompany them, he appeared still more disconcerted.

They left the Castle, and as they walked slowly down the avenue, which was the principal approach to the mansion, Merlin whispered the Earl, that he had a circumstance to mention, which, at present, he desired

desired might be confided to his Lordship alone.—" I have no secrets," said the hermit, " but one does not always like to be teased; and if Sir Humphrey Bohun hear what I am about to tell you, he will let me have no rest as long as I remain here."

The concluding part of the sentence made some amends for the alarm of the introduction, as it in some measure confirmed the dependance which the Earl of Hereford had originally placed on the firmness and consistency of Merlin's resolution; he therefore told him, that they would invent some excuse for separating themselves from their company; but before there occurred any opportunity of doing so, Bohun, who had observed that Merlin was unusually grave, turned suddenly round, and with a familiar tap on the shoulder, said jocularly, " Why, how now, Merlin? you are as dull as if you had seen the black spirit last night."

Merlin was never more disconcerted, than by this unexpected question—he detested

tested falsehood, and hated that sort of equivocal deception, by which some persons think they can guard themselves from the vice and disgrace of lying, without losing the conveniency of it; and, at the same time, he was unwilling to expose himself to the raillery of Bohun, which, in the exhilarated state of his spirits, and the depressed condition of his own, he felt that he could scarcely endure.

He tried to disguise his vexation as well as he could, but it was not without some hesitation that he replied—"I wish I had seen him; I should then have been much better satisfied."

"Has he been whispering again?" said Bohun.

"He has," said the hermit; "but I must seriously entreat you to say no more on the subject at present."

The Earl of Hereford looked significantly at Bohun, who immediately changed the conversation; but the cheerfulness of the party was dissipated in an instant, for the

Lady

Lady Bolebec could not help thinking, that the introduction of this extraordinary agent again must have some relation to little Edward; and the curiosity of the Earl rendered him almost as unfit for conversation as Merlin himself, who was trembling with eagerness to disclose to his friend the singular circumstances which had happened.

Their visit was, therefore, converted into a sort of cursory lounge; and having taken a slight and transient view of the place, which had been so often a subject for grave disputation on the part of Merlin, and of merriment to Sir Humphrey Bohun, the Earl of Hereford, taking Merlin by the arm, drew him into a path which led towards the heath; whilst the Lady Bolebec and Bohun returned towards Mordeford Castle.

"My dear friend," said the Earl, "it grieves me to see your spirits so evidently affected by any circumstances, whatsoever they may be; but evils, you know, are lightened by participation, and if I can

sustain

sustain any part of your sorrows, it is an act of friendship to afford me the opportunity."

"What I feel at present," replied the hermit, "is a mixture of terror and uncertainty, which cannot be described—my soul is harrassed by a thousand chimeras. I will explain myself, by relating the strange occurrences which have happened.

"After having yesterday, on my return to Holme-wood, looked around amongst some of the poor cottagers, who have shewn me so much kindness for many years, and shaken hands with them, in the sincerest hope that I may effect more benefit towards them, by leaving a retirement in which I must have been sometimes even burthensome to them, when I foolishly supposed that I was only receiving a due compensation for services, which, alas! were in themselves of more ideal than intrinsic value; and with assured confidence, that although we parted, perhaps to see each other no more, on the delightful banks

banks of the Wye, yet that we shall meet again in another and a better world; in that blissful seat, in which no proud pre-eminence mocks the humility of the poor, and where the soul, no longer shackled by corporeal encumbrances, will expand in full perfection of knowledge and of happiness, equally devoid of envy or of pride; where cares and troubles being past, the haven of everlasting peace is the reward of just men made perfect. With this consolatory sentiment, I retired to the hermitage; and kneeling down, commended myself to the protection of Providence, during the solitude and darkness of the night. Then throwing myself on the pallet, which had been the companion of my melancholy for so many long, long years of ineffectual mourning, as I lay revolving in my mind the principal occurrences which had varied the monotony of such an existence, the accustomed voice of the black spirit, but in a tone of anger, thus addressed me:—

'Mischievous

'Mischievous hermit, how thinkest thou to deserve that Heaven to which thou hast dared to appeal, when thou hast disobeyed its voice?'

'What meanest thou?' I answered.

"The voice replied—'Why regardest thou not my orders?'

"My mind was so intent on the important event, to me important, of quitting my retirement, that at the moment, I scarcely thought of the discovery of the child, but imagined that this visit must have been occasioned by my intention to leave the hermitage.

"I could not remember that I had ever received any intimation from the black spirit; and I knew that I had never presumed to think that it was any other impulse, besides the mere distraction of my own unhappy mind, which had made me become an inhabitant of this solitary dwelling. Whilst I was musing, the voice, as if impatient of an answer, proceeded—'How hast thou dared to make known the

abode

abode of the unfortunate woman, when I charged thee on thy life, not to approach the ruins of Rosemont Castle?'

'I did not discover her abode,' I replied; 'nor did I visit the ruins, until the completion of thine own prophecy gave me, as I thought, permission.'

'Who came to thee?' said the voice.

'Black spirit,' I replied, 'if thou hast the sacred fillet of celestial knowledge bound round thy brows, thou knowest who came to me. It is enough that the child is restored to his parents.'

'Then thy treachery is manifest,' said the voice; 'and thou shalt feel the just resentment of my insulted power.'

'Thy threats are vain,' I replied: 'the justice of Heaven will be my protection; therefore, Satanic spirit, avaunt!'

"A murmuring and resentful groan ensued—in a few minutes the thatched roof of the hermitage was involved in a blaze of fire. I arose in haste, but the door had been fastened on the outside; and it

was

was not until I was surrounded by the flames, which singed my garments and my hair, that fear giving me an increase of strength, I succeeded in forcing open the door. So rapidly destructive was the vengeful element, that I had scarcely quitted the spot before the roof fell in; and every part of my little dwelling capable of combustion was, in little more than half an hour, entirely consumed.

"Had any human being been there, the light diffused by the flames must have exposed him to my view.

"Amidst the general wreck, I did not, however, forget the thanks which were due to Providence, for having preserved me unhurt, amidst the ravages of the devouring flame. I invoked the black spirit to witness the impotence of his malevolence, whilst conscious that I had not wilfully offended, I could look on the havoc made by his revenge, if not with tranquillity, at least without repining. The first Christians suffered persecution joyfully;

'Surely,'

'Surely,' said I, 'we may learn at least to bear it patiently.'

"The affectionate cottagers, alarmed by the conflagration, and apprehensive for my safety, hastened to render their friendly assistance. Every one was anxious to know the cause of what they, at first, supposed to be an accident. My recluse mode of life, and the inoffensiveness of it, rendered it scarcely possible to imagine, that there could be on the face of this earth, any creature so diabolical as to have attempted to overwhelm a harmless old man in so terrible a destruction. One of the cottagers, however, who lives at no great distance from the hermitage, has afforded some intelligence, which renders me uncertain on this head, and has increased my doubts respecting the black spirit; to whom, however questionable might be his shape, I am compelled to attribute the burning of the hermitage.

"This poor fellow was awakened out of his sleep, by a knock at the door; and on

enquiring who was there, was answered—'Go and bury the burnt carcase of your old hermit!'

"The man, in great consternation, opened the door, but saw no one. Observing, however, an uncommon light, in the direction towards the hermitage, he ran that way; and in a few minutes having passed the corner of the wood, which had before obscured the spot from his view, saw the blazing thatch, and hastening forward, was one of the first who arrived to my assistance.

"The poor fellow was overjoyed to find me alive, and unhurt by the flames; and having communicated an account of the manner in which he received intelligence of the fire, his neighbours agreed with him in suspecting the unknown informant, of the villainy of a transaction which, I think, it is almost equally difficult to attribute to human turpitude or corporeal agency."

"My dear friend," said the Earl, who had

had listened to the relation with great attention, " it is evident that the black spirit, by whatsoever means the deception may have been practised, must be either, directly or indirectly, connected with the persons concerned in stealing Edward de Bolebec; and, perhaps, on comparing the account which was brought to Mordeford Castle yesterday, with the circumstances you have now related, some light may be thrown on the transaction, which is still so much involved in mystery. Perhaps you have not been apprised of the return of the old shepherd's sons to the ruins of Rosemont."

" Are they there?" said Merlin.

" No," replied the Earl; " their father left them at his cottage, when he came to Mordeford Castle yesterday; but on his return thither, which was in the afternoon, they had just quitted the spot; and, as we have understood this morning, have not since been seen there."

" But how can their return," rejoined

Merlin, "account for the voice which I have so repeatedly heard; the screams and groans which have again and again appalled me, though fortified by all the reflections by which my mind could prepare itself, against the influences of terror or surprise?

"How could it explain the wonderful dictates of the invisible, respecting him who was to be the instrument of the discovery of the child? or elucidate the equally surprising accomplishment of so extraordinary a prophecy?

"What assistance can it afford us, in forming any new opinion, respecting the supernatural agency, by which an agonizing shriek was made immediately to follow, and to be seemingly produced by a blow of my staff upon the chair?

"These things still appear to me to admit of no change of sentiment, respecting their production. And even if it were possible to conceive, that the removal of the pitcher and the loaf had been effected by

by the robbers, or even that the same men set fire to my hermitage, in order to have accomplished such effects, they must have steeped my senses in forgetfulness, in a manner which, being wholly unconscious of it, I never could allow even to the most obstinate and pertinacious disputant."

"I am not able," replied the Earl, "to answer any of these questions; they have often presented themselves to my mind; but I dare go no farther than this—that as, on the one hand, we have no right to deny that an event is impossible, because we do not see it happen, so on the other, we have no right to assume that any event must necessarily depend on this or that particular cause, merely on account of our having sometimes witnessed, that the like has been so produced.

"I would still look forward to some explanation of circumstances, so truly wonderful as those which have happened at the hermitage, without presuming to

entertain any doubts respecting the facts themselves, or that they may have been produced by supernatural agency; but at the same time, without pretending to deny that they may have been brought about by natural means, employed in an extraordinary manner, which, although at present hidden from our knowledge, and inscrutable to my researches, may hereafter be fully and satisfactorily explained, so as to be capable of a clear and undoubted apprehension."

Merlin, who always attended, with a degree of respect bordering on religious awe, whenever his noble and judicious friend delivered his opinions, was so well satisfied with the degree of coincidence which he perceived between the sentiments which he had just heard, and those which he himself entertained, that he immediately assured the Earl, that notwithstanding Sir Humphrey Bohun's notions, he had no more bias in favour of the existence of the black spirit, than of any of the necromantic

tic legends of antiquity; and that he should unfeignedly rejoice at the arrival of a period, in which the thick films which now obstruct our intellectual vision, should be completely removed, and the rays of pure and eternal truth admitted in all their native splendor and refulgence.

CHAP. V.

As they proceeded towards Mordeford Castle, "You see, my Lord," said Merlin, "that if I had been inclined to superstition, I might have pleaded the fire at the hermitage, as a proof that I was acting in opposition to my duty, by determining to quit the place; I might have

called it a judgment from Heaven, for entertaining such a design."

"You might, indeed," said the Earl, "and with as much reason as the miracle-mongers of the day; though you will allow, that to burn your habitation, was rather an extraordinary method of inviting you to remain there.

"However, among the truly superstitious, the more absurd any thing is, the more credit is usually attached to it. They consider, that if it required no ingenuity to divest it of its miraculous covering, it would neither be worth the trouble of defending or propagating it; and thus the empire of wonder has spread its dominion far and wide, and acquires new subjects daily, from the natural love which all the world have for what exceeds their comprehension.

"This has occasioned necromancy to become a science; and the custom of attaching to wise men and philosophers, in all ages, the notion of their being conjurors—

rors—at least, among the profane and illiterate vulgar.

"The principles of natural philosophy are known but to very few; the phenomena of nature are, therefore, often reckoned miraculous, because they are not understood. The different effects of confederacy being secret, excite, by their various combinations, all the sentiments of astonishment, terror, and admiration.

"Among a rude and barbarous people, like our Pictish or Scandinavian ancestors, what would not have been the effect, produced by the sight of the embattled phalanx of the Macedonians, clad in complete panoply?

"What must have been the impression on the mind of a simple shepherd of the Alps, if he should have been on a sudden, removed from his native mountains, into the imperial city, and have there beheld panthers, tygers, elephants, and lions, the savage monarchs of the forest, tamely submitting to be harnessed to triumphal

cars, and crouching at the feet of the effeminate and luxurious Romans?

"Undoubtedly, he would not have perceived at once, all the various circumstances which must have concurred, to produce a spectacle so astonishing. He could not deny the evidence of his senses. In hasty attempts to arrive at some conclusion, he would resort to the common, I had almost said, intuitive practice of mankind—he would have called it miraculous; or attributed the inexplicable and novel scene, to the influence of demoniacal agency, or the art magical.'

"Persons riding on horseback, clothed and armed, through a country in which neither horses nor armour had ever been seen before, would naturally have produced equal astonishment among the inhabitants.

"Unaccustomed to such an heterogeneous combination of form, would it be unlikely that they should mistake them for beings of a superior order, or that they should

should imagine the rider to be a constituent part of the animal that carried him?

"You and I hear the sound of the human voice, in a manner to which we have not been accustomed—we feel surprised! Effects follow, and seem to be produced by the voice, which we have been used to observe, only from the exercise of corporeal organs and muscular strength, as of the hands and feet impelled by the power of volition—we are then astonished!

"Perhaps, like the Macedonian phalanx, the Roman triumph, and the figure of the Equestrian, this may be only wonderful to us, because it is strange; and although *we* cannot account for it, the effect may depend upon natural causes, perfectly accordant with the general regularity of that vast system which we inhabit, without knowing how or when it was constructed, or how and to what end preserved.

"In like manner, a person, when he first hears his own voice reflected in reit-

erated cadences, is astonished at the echo. It is sometimes even more than astonishing —under some circumstances, almost terrific. But although he might not be able philosophically to explain the principles of it, he might yet know that they are capable of elucidation; he might even perceive, that his removal a few paces from the spot where he had witnessed so singular a phenomenon, or even giving another direction to his voice, was capable of altering the effect which had at first surprised and affrighted him.

" We return, therefore, I think, to the original axiom, that we have no right to deny that time may unveil that which is at present hidden in mystery; may afford a complete explanation of that which we are now ignorant of, and remove our doubts respecting subjects now the most obscure and intricate.

" Nay, farther, that as explanation, whenever it come, must always reach us through the medium of our corporeal

senses, so it is, at least, reasonable to expect, that what has been mysterious, will resolve itself, by natural means, into plain matter of fact, cognizable by the same senses, and consequently capable of demonstration."

Merlin, more and more impressed by the enlightened observations of the Earl of Hereford, would have willingly protracted his walk till the verge of daylight, but they had now nearly reached Mordeford Castle.

The Lady Bolebec and Sir Humphrey Bohun had returned some time before; and intelligence of the destruction of the hermitage, in so wanton and atrocious a manner, had already afforded them a sufficient reason for the gloom and dejection which had overspread the countenance of Merlin, when they parted from him at noon.

Bohun, who, although no man was more fond of that good-humoured hilarity, which is always productive of mirth in those

those who witness it, as well as those who possess it, well knew, not only that raillery should never be pursued longer than the person rallied maintains his good humour equally with those around him, but that although follies and prejudices are at some times fair game, there are periods when it is improper to meddle with them. He had, therefore, felt very uncomfortable, when he found that his remark respecting the black spirit was so ill-timed; for he had a sincere regard for the old hermit, and would have done any thing in his power to promote his happiness.

On the return of Merlin to the Castle, with the Earl of Hereford, Bohun approached them; and with more seriousness in his manner than usual, taking the hermit by the hand, said, "My dear Merlin, I have two great favours to ask of you, which, I trust, you will be equally disposed to grant—the first is, that you will forgive my abruptness and unseasonable levity this morning."

"Indeed,

"Indeed, Sir Humphrey," replied Merlin, "it was already not only forgiven but forgotten; for I could not imagine what you were going to say."

"The second request," continued Bohun, "is, that as your hermitage has been destroyed, you will accept of another in the neighbourhood—and accordingly, take up your abode, henceforth, in any apartment of this Castle which you like best, excepting the kitchen, which I cannot spare, and the great hall, in which the noise made at Christmas would disturb you."

"I am very grateful, Sir Knight," replied Merlin, "for your friendship and kindness; but I trust you will not think me the less so, if I decline your offer, as I have a previous engagement. I do not, however, intend to refuse your proffered hospitality altogether, and will thankfully accept an apartment, wherever you please, for a few days."

"But, my good friend, why not remain

main here constantly? why bury yourself in the woods again?"

"What would you think of me, Sir Humphrey, if I should abandon the hermit's garb altogether? I scarcely consider myself as having any right to it, since they have burnt my habitation."

"I should think," replied the Knight, "that you deserved the character of a wise man, although you might then probably lose that of a conjuror."

Merlin smiled—"I have really some such intention, Sir Humphrey, but I assure you it was neither occasioned by the fire, nor the black spirit, but by my noble friend here, who has taken great pains to convince me of the absurdity and impropriety of my conduct."

"Well," replied Bohun, "you may settle that between yourselves; but Merlin, if you do "*quit the habit*," as the monks call it, I must insist upon it that you give me your shoes."

"One of them, most readily," said Merlin,

Merlin, (with increasing vivacity); "the other I intend to keep; lest, if I take it in my head to turn hermit again, I should not be able to furnish myself with another pair, for want of a pattern."

"One will do; I wanted it only as a present to my friend, Sir John Vanhattem, who has a room stuffed with curiosities and antiques, which have been raked out of his moat and fish-ponds, or dug out of Roman barrows and military highways. There are a thousand nameless rarities of uncommon birds, which he believes to have been hatched from the kernels of fruit-trees; fishes, with wings to fly in the air; and an incredible number of umbos of shields, spear heads, ravels of spurs, and broken jugs, not one of which is half so curious, or so well worth preserving, as Merlin's shoe."

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

The cottagers in the vicinity of the hermitage were so much exasperated by the destruction of it, which they absolutely looked upon as sacrilege, that of their own accord, they made the most diligent search after the persons who had been guilty of so flagrant an act. No part of the wood, nor of the adjoining chase, escaped their scrutiny. They approached even the ruins of Rosemont; and so great were their respect and veneration for the hermit, that even the terrific apprehension of a thousand spectres, the grim inhabitants of the infernal regions, and all the mangled limbs

or

or headless trunks, of those who had been murdered in the dreary vaults, and which were believed to traverse the detested spot continually, making the day gloomy and the night hideous, were insufficient to deter them from advancing even to the bushes which surrounded the walls. Beyond them they could not penetrate; nor did they look with sufficient attention, to discover the passage leading to the old shepherd's cottage.

In the whole of their search, they neither detected the offenders, nor obtained any information which could fix suspicion upon any one, or was at all likely to assist them in their enquiries.

They loved the hermit with filial affection, and attended to his injunctions with the most religious punctuality. He had been the umpire of all their disputes, the judge of all their difficulties, their instructor, their counsellor, and their friend.

In taking leave of them, he had promised

mised to be their frequent visitor; that his ears should be always open to their applications, wheresoever he might be; and that the study and the pleasure of his remaining days, would be to promote their happiness, and the welfare of their children.

They had seen the little dwelling, which they had determined among themselves to fence round by an enclosure, to preserve it from injury or encroachment, as a monument of their regard for the virtues of him who had once tenanted the humble shed—savagely torn from their custody and their gratitude, by ruffian hands, who had given it to the devouring flames, and threatened the life of their benefactor.

The place, however, remained; verdure still smiled around it; and the grove of beech, the row of elms, and the wide-spreading oak, beneath whose branches the hermit, in primitive simplicity, and with almost patriarchal dignity, delivered his admonitions,

admonitions, or pronounced his reproofs, still marked the spot which had been so long endeared to them.

The ivy, which clung with increasing attachment to the end of the hermitage, nearly perished with it; but the hawthorn, which grew by its side, was left a melancholy mourner.

Its blossoms were eagerly sought for by the youthful peasants, to decorate their garlands on days of festivity; and as long as a vestige of it remained, it was regarded with as much veneration as the Glastonbury thorn.

It was first a memorial, next a relic, and afterwards a charm. Happy was the rustic who could possess himself by stealth, of a morsel of the precious wood; and he preserved it with as much care, as, in after-times, the admirers of Shakespeare treasured the fragments of the mulberry-tree, reared by the hand of their immortal bard.

" Behold this fair goblet was formed from the tree,
Which, O my sweet *Shakespeare*, was planted by thee;
As a relic I kiss it, and bow at thy shrine,
What comes from thy hand, must be ever divine!"

Sir Humphrey Bohun caused the cottager, who had been called up in the night by the stranger, as before related, to be sent for to Mordeford Castle, in order that he might be particularly questioned relative to the affair.

His account did not at all vary from that which Merlin had already stated to the Earl of Hereford.

Having no previous suspicion of such an occurrence, his attention to the person who knocked at his door was only attracted by the singularity of the communication. He said that he came out immediately, and saw no person there; but that as the night was dark, it would have been easy for anybody to have escaped out of sight, in the time which was requisite for opening the door: that he heard no footsteps,

steps, but accounted for that, by observing that his cottage stood on a piece of smooth turf, over which any one passing lightly, especially when no particular attention was directed to him, might escape notice.

He felt so much concern on account of the hermit, who, he said, had been a father to him, that he lost every other consideration, in hastening to see if it was too late to afford him any assistance; and that he was so much rejoiced to find the old man safe and unhurt, that he for awhile forgot the manner of the communication which had brought him to the spot.

The suspicions of Sir Humphrey Bohun and Bolebec naturally fell upon the sons of the old shepherd; and as there now seemed to be but little probability of their venturing to return to Rosemont, Sir Hugh was anxious that the old man and his family should now leave the ruins, lest they should be exposed to personal injury, from the resentment of the two villains;

lains, who, if they should discover that the hermit had escaped their vengeance, would, perhaps, follow up that diabolical effort, by a deed even of still blacker dye.

The shepherd and his wife were, therefore, directed to repair to Mordeford Castle, bringing with them their sheep and goats; for there was, even at that period, as Sir Humphrey Bohun observed, something in the character of an Englishman, which made him feel a gratification, even in the semblance of being independant in any respect, however he might stand in need of assistance and protection, in the most important points.

Such is, indeed, the difference between the sentiments of a free man and a slave; and it is a great error, to believe that the condition of the lower classes of this nation, even in the feudal times, (when it is acknowledged that severe oppressions were too often practised without the power of redress,) was of a description either half so degrading, or

half

half so miserable, as that of the vassals of the northern countries at present, much less in the period of Visigothic barbarism.

When Devereux left Mordeford Castle, it has been related that it was his intention to push forward, with the utmost expedition, towards the village in which the parents of the unfortunate Agnes lived.

He only stopped to bait his horses, and take some refreshment, with which one of his attendants was provided, once during the whole day; and would have proceeded through the night, without halting a second time; but his horses were so completely tired, that he found it necessary, by the time it became dark, to seek for a lodging for himself and his servants.

As the sun was setting, its declining rays had been brilliantly reflected from a building on the summit of a high hill, nearly in a direct line before them. The effect was so striking, that it could not be overlooked. The roads were very intricate, and there were a variety of different

paths and intersections, which might have puzzled any person not perfectly well acquainted with the country; and Devereux having never been there before, was induced rather to steer his course by particular objects, than any acquaintance with the geography of the district. It was become dark—they had got into a narrow road, and the recollection of the high hill which they had noticed at sun-setting, was the only clue by which they were apprised, by the steep ascent upon which they were now entering, that they must have arrived at the foot of the eminence, on which they had seen the large mansion-house.

As the place seemed to belong to some person of opulence and condition, Devereux formed the resolution, as they were leading their horses up the hill, to seek entertainment and a night's lodging there.

When they arrived at the top of the ascent, a narrow road, branching off to the left hand, seemed to lead towards the mansion. Devereux, therefore, directed one

of

of his servants to ride forward, and announce, according to the usage of the times, who he was; to enquire who resided there, and to request the accommodation of a night's lodging.

Having waited some time in expectation of the return of the servant, Devereux being somewhat surprised at his delay, was proceeding himself towards the mansion, when he met the fellow coming back. He said that he had both knocked and rung at the gate, but could not make any one hear.

The horses were so much fatigued, by the badness of the roads and the length of the journey, that it appeared not only difficult, but impracticable, to proceed much farther; and therefore, Devereux determined, at all events, to make one more effort to gain admittance.

It was a castellated mansion, with a court before it, on the side by which they approached. An iron gate secured the entrance, and by the side of it was ap-

pendant the handle of a bell. This bell had been rung by the servant, but he could not procure any answer from those within, although it was evident that the house was inhabited, by the neatness observable every where. They pulled the bell again, but in vain; and as it was impossible either to open the gate or climb over the wall, they had no other alternative than to retreat altogether, or endeavour to find some other entrance.

It was becoming darker every moment, and their desire to obtain admittance was augmented by this circumstance, as well as by the stimulus of curiosity.

They groped their way round the wall which enclosed the court, and after some time came to a flight of steps, where one of the attendants remained, holding the horses, whilst Devereux, with the other, proceeded to examine the building on that side.

The steps brought them upon a handsome terrace, paved with stone, and guarded

ed by a parapet; at each angle of which, was a stone pillar, or obelisk, of considerable height.

The building appeared to be very stately, and a long range of windows opened upon the terrace, which, from its elevation, seemed to command an extensive prospect; but the darkness prevented them from forming any certain opinion about it. The object of the travellers was principally to gain admittance into the interior of the house; but on this side they could not perceive any entrance at all.

At the termination of the terrace was another flight of steps. Devereux, determined to proceed, descended. At the foot of the steps was an open porch or archway, leading into a long passage, which they supposed led to the house. They entered it without hesitation, and it brought them to a door, to which was affixed a large brass ring. Devereux pulled it, and heard the sound of a bell, which, from the violence that had been used,

continued to sound for a considerable time, the vaulted roof re-echoing its vibrations.

It had scarcely ceased, when they heard some person walking within; but the noise of the footsteps gradually died away; and Devereux, impatient of such apparent churlishness, applied himself with vigour to the bell, and rang a second peal, still louder than the first.

In a few minutes, a light appeared at the end of a cross passage on the left hand; and a small window opening, a man looked out and demanded what they meant by ringing that bell?

Devereux replied, that he was a stranger, who, being benighted, and his horses unable to proceed by reason of fatigue, was desirous of being accommodated with a lodging for himself and his servants.

"The family is absent," said the man, who looked like an old servant, and had a very respectable appearance; "and therefore, before I dare admit you into the house,

house, I must be informed who you are, and what brings you to this unfrequented place at so late an hour?"

"I am the son of the Earl of Hereford," answered Devereux; "and I am going on particular business from Mordeford Castle, where my father now is, to a small village near Bernwood Forest; and as the affair is urgent, would gladly have travelled all night, but my horses, which are at the foot of the steps leading to the terrace, are unable to proceed."

"You mentioned Mordeford Castle," said the porter; "pray tell me who lives there now?"

"Sir Humphrey Bohun," replied Devereux.

"He does," said the old man, "and I dare say it is all right; and though I do not like to admit strangers after it is dark, I will not refuse you a lodging. Let your horses be brought round to the opposite side of the building, and I will send a person to meet them."

Devereux ordered the servant to return, and assist in leading the horses to the place where he was desired. The porter immediately opened the door, and admitted Devereux into the mansion. He followed him through the passage, which terminated at the foot of a noble staircase, that seemed to lead to the principal apartments. Here the old servant requested Devereux to wait for a few minutes, whilst he procured the keys; and setting down the lamp which he had carried in his hand, crossed a quadrangle, which, from the sound of his footsteps, seemed of considerable size.

Devereux presently heard the gates unlocked and unbolted; and the appearance both of the men and horses was sufficient to remove any doubt which might have remained on the mind of the porter, respecting his guests: the former being properly habited as the attendants of persons of distinction in that age, in peaceable times; and the latter answering the description

scription already given of them by Devereux exactly, for they were scarcely able to stand upon their legs; so that he was perfectly convinced no deceit had been practised upon him.

The old man desired the servants to leave the care of the horses to a lad whom he called, and directed to give them provender; observing, that they seemed not much more in want of it than their riders; and then invited the attendants into the kitchen, whilst he lighted Devereux up the staircase into a handsome apartment, which appeared to have been formerly furnished with considerable magnificence.

On the servants entering the kitchen, they were met by a neat old woman, the porter's wife, who immediately enquired if they had not rung at the front gate about half an hour before? On being answered in the affirmative—"There now," said she, "I knew that I was right, for although I did not hear it, I saw the wires

move; but my husband has got such an obstinate spirit of contradiction, that sooner than acknowledge he is ever in the wrong, he would deny that the moon ever shines at midnight."

It appeared that this was one of those happy couples, whom perhaps Love first joined together, for the purpose of shewing the effect of perpetual collision.

"Gentlemen," added the offended female, "it was not my fault that you have been detained so long at the gate; and I am exceeding sorry for it; for I told this obstinate fellow," pointing to her husband, who was just returned to the kitchen, "that I was certain sure there was somebody ringing at the bell; but he would not believe it; indeed, he minds me no more than an old apple-woman."

"Hold your nonsensical tongue," said the man; "the gentlemen rung the chapel bell, and not the bell you talk of." Then taking up the light, he swore he would stay no longer to be plagued by her noise,

and

and returned to the room to which he had conducted Devereux.

He found him admiring the compartments of the wainscot, which were finely carved; and told him, that if he had any curiosity to see the rest of the apartments, in the morning he would attend him, for the purpose of being his guide; but presumed, that at present he would be glad of his supper, which, he was sorry to say, would be no better than a few eggs, such being the only provision he had in the house.

Devereux thanked him for his hospitality, but assured him that he intended to pursue his journey at sun-rising; and, therefore, that whilst supper was preparing, if he would indulge him with a sight of the house, he should feel the more obliged; observing, that from the view he had of it on their approach, it appeared to be a very magnificent building.

"It is so," said the old man; "but alas! my Lord has not been here these

many years; and though we keep it in pretty good repair, it is nothing like what it used to be formerly, when it was filled with company, week after week, and furnished with plenty of good cheer."

"Pray what is the name of your master?" said Devereux.

"He is the Earl of Clifford," replied the servant; "but he has not been in England these many years."

"I thought he had been dead," said Devereux.

"No, Sir, I hope not. He went to France, and afterwards to Rome; and some people said that he was murdered there; however, that is not true, for I saw him once since at Clifford Castle, with the Earl of Leicester; but they had a dispute, and my Lord swore that he would never set his foot in that place again, and nobody knows where he went to. It is a great pity to leave such a house as this."

The porter now returned once more to his wife, to give directions about supper; and

and after another quarrel about the manner in which the eggs should be dressed, came back to Devereux, but not before he had told the servants, in the hearing of his wife, that although they had hardly ever been absent from each other, for twenty-four hours together, during the last twenty years, he did not believe that they ever passed a single day, without three or four quarrels at the least.

Then leaving the old woman to comment upon his remarks, he attended Devereux, in order to shew him the apartments of Kingsbury Place.

"We must begin, Sir, if you please," said the porter, "at the great gateway, for that is my usual method; and I should hardly know how to describe the rooms, if I went any other way."

Devereux followed him across the quadrangle, and perceived that the principal entrance was by the gate which they had first seen, opening into the court on the south side of the building.

On

On the left, and immediately within the entrance-gate, was a magnificent flight of steps, which they ascended; and the porter throwing open a pair of folding doors, disclosed to the astonished Devereux, a hall far exceeding, in size and magnificence, that at Glandon Tower, which was generally esteemed one of the most stately in England.

This fine room was wainscotted with Norway oak; and vast embossments ornamented the frames of the doors, window-cases, and chimney-place. The latter was capacious enough to have allowed the roasting of an ox.

Each end was divided from the body of the room by a row of pillars, finely fluted, supporting two galleries; that at the entrance for the accommodation of spectators, who were either not permitted, or not disposed, to partake of the entertainments given in this noble apartment; the other for those who enlivened the feast;

feast, by playing upon musical instruments.

At the upper end of the hall was another grand flight of steps; and two stuffed moose deer, with their enormous antlers, seemed to guard a large arm-chair, richly carved, which was intended for the use of the Lord of the mansion on great festivals. Here also he was seated amidst his assembled vassals, to receive the homage of his dependants, and promulgate the feudal and despotic mandates by which they were governed.

An arched doorway at the end of the hall, led them into the first of that magnificent suit of apartments, which opened upon the terrace before mentioned.

The second of these rooms was extremely grand. The wainscot was of cedar, exquisitely carved; and the floor was inlaid with ivory and ebony, in the most beautiful manner. All the cushions of the chairs, and a canopy at one end of the room, were of velvet richly embroidered;

and

and although the porter assured Devereux that the room had never been used, and was seldom entered by any one besides his wife and himself, for the purpose of keeping it clean, during more than thirty years, every thing appeared in the neatest and most perfect order and condition.

The adjoining apartment, the old man told Devereux, was seldom shewn to any body. How great was his surprise, on entering it, to see a table magnificently covered, as if for a sumptuous banquet! From the centre of the ceiling was suspended a gilt branch or chandelier: the walls were hung with tapestry, representing on one side the story of Queen Esther, and on the other, the marriage in Cana, with the miraculous conversion of water into wine.

Crystal cups, spoons, and dishes, were on the table; on one side stood a great salt-seller of silver gilt, which exhibited an exact model of Kingsbury House; and a profuse display of vases, bowls, drinking

ing horns, and other articles for the purpose of refection, was exhibited on marble tables on each side of the room.

Devereux at first supposed that the old man had designed to surprise him, and was in momentary expectation to see the company, for whom these preparations were apparently made, enter the room. "I thought," said he, "that you told me the family was absent—for whom are these preparations?"

The porter observed the surprise of Devereux, and smiling, replied, "I see your astonishment, Sir; and perhaps it will be increased, when I tell you that these things were exactly in the same order when I came hither, almost forty years ago; and that our orders are, never to suffer them, on any account, to be displaced."

Even the chairs were set in order for the reception of the guests; and Devereux having approached nearer, to examine the decorations of the table more minutely, perceived a scroll, which appeared

peared as if it had slipped from one of the covers, on which was written in very legible characters,

"Poison lurks among the dishes."

"Excuse my curiosity," said Devereux, "but I am impatient to know the meaning of this extraordinary scene."

"You must know, Sir, that my Lord expected company to sup with him on a very particular occasion, but a sad accident happened, which prevented their coming; the supper was ready, however, and my Lord returned alone; and as he was coming into this room, an old servant, who is long since dead, put this writing in his hand. He was very much affected, and it was thought he would have died at the time; but he got the better of it, and then left Kingsbury, and has never been here since. However, he gave strict orders for every thing to be taken care of; and when I was hired to come here, the steward made me take an oath, that I would never

never suffer any of the furniture in this room to be moved out of its place, without an order from my Lord himself."

"Then I suppose it was intended that poison should be given to Lord Clifford, as well as his guests?" said Devereux.

"It was," replied the servant; "but when my Lord received the writing, he called for the person who was suspected; and whether his conscience smote him, or what it was, I cannot say; but instead of going to him, he went out and drowned himself in one of the fish-ponds."

Passing through another apartment almost equally splendid, they came to a bed-chamber, which was decorated with silk hangings, and the bedstead was of ebony, finely carved, and inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

This suit of apartments terminated with a closet beyond the bed-chamber, in which was a large collection of books, such as metrical romances, old chronicles, and others, which had been collected by

the

the Earl of Clifford in his youth. Devereux would have gladly staid to examine them, if his time would have allowed him such an indulgence.

From the closet was a door opening into the gallery of the chapel, a magnificent room, answerable in size and situation to the great hall before described. There was also a private staircase leading into the quadrangle, and a passage communicating with that part of the house to which Devereux was first conducted on his arrival, and whither he now returned, to partake of the refreshment which had been provided for him.

Having supped, he directed his servants to call him at the earliest appearance of daylight; and with many thanks for the hospitality he had experienced, retired to the chamber prepared for his reception.

The furniture was extremely rich; and it struck him as a matter of surprise, that Kingsbury had altogether escaped the ravages,

vages, by which so many noble houses had been desolated and destroyed during the late unhappy times; until he recollected, that the old servant had mentioned the Earl of Leicester, as being an intimate acquaintance of his Lord; and, therefore, imagined that Kingsbury might possibly have owed its preservation to the friendship and power of Montfort.

CHAP. VII.

In the morning, Devereux pursued his journey. As he mounted his horse at the principal gate of Kingsbury, he could not help regretting that the urgency of his journey

journey prevented him from seeing more of the building and its accompaniments.

It was a fine grey morning; and the breaking mists opened occasionally such delightful prospects towards the west, that he could not help feeling sincerely sorry, that his road had not lain in that direction, instead of the contrary.

The porter instructed him how to find the nearest way to Oxford; and Devereux proceeded with so much speed, that he had soon left Kingsbury far behind him.

All his expedition was, however, useless; for although he met with no accident to retard his progress, and arrived at the village of Hornton, several hours before the time he had thought it likely that he should have been able to accomplish the journey, Agnes had eluded his pursuit, having already taken her departure from her father's cottage, for that "undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns."

The unfortunate girl was so ill, on her

return to her relations, that her conductors had been under the necessity of leaving her at a cottage, about ten miles distant from the habitation of her parents, whilst they went to inform them of her condition, and the place where she might be found.

At their departure they presented her with a purse of money, and assured her that they would see her again in a short time.

The parents of Agnes, with great difficulty, effected her removal to their own cottage. They were, of course, anxious to learn the particulars of her flight from Glandon Tower, of which they had been long before apprised by a messenger from Sir Hugh de Bolebec, whose information had occasioned them the most painful sensations of alarm.

Agnes seemed to struggle with her own feelings, whenever she touched upon this subject; but at length, disclosed enough for her parents to understand, that she had

had bestowed her affections on some unworthy object, who had influenced her to become a party in the removal of the child Edward from Glandon; and thus his designed object being accomplished, the fond and respectful lover became the faithless seducer; and soon afterwards, left the wretched Agnes, to pine away the remainder of a miserable existence, in unavailing regret and anguish.

With whatsoever affliction her parents received this information, they had too much humanity to increase her distress by reproaches; and they were now principally desirous of discovering where she had left the child, in order that they might communicate the intelligence to the family of Bolebec.

On this head, Agnes could afford no farther information, than that she had been removed from one place to another, until at last, she came to a cottage situated among the ruins of an old castle, the name of which she had never heard: that

after

after remaining there for some time, she had been compelled to leave the spot, without any previous intimation of their design, by the two men who had conducted her thither; and to leave the child behind her, with the people belonging to the cottage. On her journey towards Hornton, the men had informed her that they were about to remove Edward de Bolebec from the cottage; but when she became better, he would be again committed to her care, and a proper maintenance provided both for the child and herself. But she neither knew the name of the people, nor of the cottage where the child had been left; and it being dark both when she was carried thither, and at the time of her coming away, she was unable to give any description of the road which led to the place.

The old people very naturally enquired, who were the parties concerned in the original plot; but such was the influence of her unfortunate and insurmountable

attachment, that the unhappy Agnes burst into a flood of tears, and could never be induced to disclose the secret.

Agnes rapidly grew worse; her anxiety and distress had accelerated the progress of a consumption, by which she had been long threatened; and death relieved her from all her sufferings, on the morning of that day on which Devereux had left Mordeford Castle in search of her.

The object to which the attention of Devereux had been principally directed, seemed thus irretrievably lost; and the mystery which had all along enveloped the affair, still remained to baffle the efforts of conjecture; while the artifices or obstinacy of the accomplices, screened the perpetrators of the atrocity from detection and punishment.

Devereux knew that the only amends which he could make, for the disappointment of having failed to obtain the desired intelligence, would be by shortening, as much as possible, the period of uncer-

tainty

tainty and expectation dependant upon his absence. He therefore set his face towards Mordeford, and travelled as expeditiously as the roads would permit, without suffering any object to interrupt his progress, or protract his journey.

He necessarily passed within a few miles of Kingsbury, and descried at a hazy distance, the noble mansion of the Cliffords. He had never, in his whole life, seen any spot which he so much admired; and he heartily wished that his father might be induced to pay a visit to it, before he returned to his own mansion; not merely because he thought that the sight of it would afford him considerable gratification, but that he was inclined to hope that the Earl might be tempted to borrow some parts of the plan, for the improvements then making at Ashbury.

He intended to sleep at Abbotsford, a little town about eight miles distant from Kingsbury. On his arrival there, curiosity induced him to enquire who inhabited

the Castle, a small neat building on an eminence, at the entrance of the place. He was informed that it belonged to Sir Arthur Fitz Payne. Immediately recollecting that he had seen the Knight at Warkworth, with the Fitz Parnells, he determined on paying him a visit.

Fitz Payne was no sooner informed of the arrival of Devereux, than he hastened to meet him, and received him at the gate of the Castle with the greatest respect. He had once served under the command of the Earl of Hereford; but in the late disturbances, had joined the army of Montfort, which led to his acquaintance with the Fitz Parnells, and thus occasioned him to meet with Devereux at Warkworth Castle.

He shook hands with him with great cordiality, bade him heartily welcome to Abbotsford, and expressed himself happy in an opportunity of renewing their acquaintance, in times more auspicious to the cultivation of friendly intimacy and association,

association, than those in which they had before met.

Sir Arthur had a wife, and two beautiful daughters, to whom he immediately introduced Devereux, as his fellow-soldier in the late war, and the son of that much esteemed General, the Earl of Hereford.

Having soon discussed the ordinary topics of conversation, Devereux proceeded to inform Sir Arthur Fitz Payne of the occasion of his visit to that part of the country.

Fitz Payne observed, that he had before heard of the loss which Sir Hugh de Bolebec had sustained, but not of the recovery of his son: that he was a stranger to the family of Bolebec; but though connected with an opposite party in political principles, must ever esteem that personal courage and domestic worth, for which Sir Hugh was generally celebrated, and on account of which, his friends had given

him the illustrious appellation of "*the great Bolebec.*"

He added, that he was glad to hear of the restoration of his son; and hoped that a discovery would be made of the perpetrators of so daring an outrage.

In the course of conversation, Devereux, describing the road by which he had travelled from Mordeford Castle, mentioned his visit to the mansion of the Earl of Clifford, at Kingsbury.

Fitz Payne remarked, that it was now many years since he was at the spot; that he had once flattered himself, that in case of the death of the Earl of Clifford, it would have fallen into the hands of Simon de Montfort, who had a great partiality for the place; and that he should then have had a neighbour and a friend, who would have made his own residence still more pleasant to him. But since the death of the Earl of Leicester, and the exile of the Fitz Parnells, who were the nearest relatives

relatives of the Earl of Clifford, it was a matter of doubt to whom the property would descend. "It is, however, of great consequence to me," said Fitz Payne, "for the estate is very large, and reaches even to my own doors; so that I may be rendered either very happy or very uncomfortable, according to the temper and disposition of the possessor of Kingsbury."

"Is it certain," said Devereux, "that the Earl of Clifford is still alive; I always supposed that he had been dead long ago, until the porter at Kingsbury asserted the contrary."

"No," replied Fitz Parnell, "it is more probable that he is dead; but the Monks of Brierley have the administration of the estate, and they are not very much inclined to give up the possession of it, unless compelled either by the Earl himself, or some one who has an undoubted right to deprive them of it. They pretend that all the produce is dis-

tributed in charity; but I believe that their charity not only begins at home, but ends there."

Devereux would have been more disposed to enlarge on the beauties of Kingsbury, with which he was greatly delighted, if the charms of Emma Fitz Payne, the eldest daughter of the Knight, had not already usurped not only the first place in his mind, but, at present, obliterated every other thought, and so completely absorbed his attention, that even the mansion of the Cliffords was nearly forgotten.

Such was the impression made upon him, that almost without knowing the cause of the change which had been produced in his mind, he now saw a thousand beauties in the situation of Abbotsford Castle, and the surrounding scenery, which he had not observed on his first entering the mansion; and would have almost relinquished the thought of ever revisiting Kingsbury,

Kingsbury, might he have been permitted to continue under the roof of Fitz Payne.

Fortunately his embarrassment was overlooked by the lady of the mansion, who was one of those prudently cautious females, common enough (perhaps too common) in those days, but certainly not too frequently met with among our countrywomen at present, who, if she had perceived the least indication of "*love at first sight,*" would have immediately been desirous of securing her daughter from its influence, within the grate of a convent. But the hour of supper approaching, the Lady of Fitz Payne was so much occupied with the preparations for it, that the confusion of Devereux remained unnoticed.

The young ladies, with their mother, withdrew at an early hour; but Devereux, compelled by the reiterated importunities of his hospitable entertainer, to partake largely of the friendly bowl, was not, until

a late hour, permitted to retire to his chamber.

To his chamber, indeed, he did retire; but not to rest; the image of the beautiful Emma was every moment present to his imagination; and he resolved, that on his return to Mordeford, the first request he made to his father, should be for his permission to make direct proposals to Sir Arthur Fitz Payne, that he might be regularly admitted into his family, in the character of the admirer of his daughter.

In the morning, Devereux arose with the sun; not altogether with the design of immediately pursuing his journey, nor with any expectation of seeing, at so early an hour, the charming daughter of Fitz Payne; but because he was unable to procure any rest, and was unwilling to lose even the remotest chance of beholding the lovely object of his passion, before he took leave of Abbotsford.

The constraints of that day, and the vigilance of a mother's eye, which seemed

to open as a perpetual guard over the female part of her family, excluded every idea of conveying one word to the beautiful Emma herself, respecting the impression which her charms had made; but every glance of the love-smitten youth spoke the unutterable language of his heart; and he fondly hoped that some secret intelligence of what he felt, might thus find admission to the bosom of Emma.

Nor was the lover altogether mistaken; for when the family were assembled at the time of his departure, a bewitching smile, accompanied by the sweetest suffusion by which so graceful an assemblage of features could be heightened in their effect, overspread the countenance of the lovely girl; and almost convinced Devereux, that she was not altogether a stranger to what was passing in his mind.

Such, at least, was his hope; and this alone could have enabled him to go

through the ceremony of taking leave, with tolerable composure.

Far different was the state of his mind, at this moment, from that in which, a few hours before, he had entered Abbotsford. Then, light and free as air, no cares depressed his spirits, no alloy of apprehension clouded the horizon of his mind—but all was ease and gaiety. Now, he felt an anxiety which he could not express; a sort of tremulous hesitation, and a timid uncertainty, which, although it did not make him absolutely unhappy, destroyed both the tranquillity and chearfulness of his temper.

He was no longer amused by the objects on the road, nor the country around him; and he felt less interest than he had done before, in the prospect of soon rejoining his friends at Mordeford. There was a kind of void in his mind, which neither the conversation of others, nor the stores of his own imagination, nor the re-

sources

sources of his memory, were able to fill up.

Unconscious of having done any thing for which he ought to reproach himself, he had lost that self-complacency which he thought was the result of innate rectitude, but found to be, in reality, at least partly, the effect of independence.

Emma, the dear Emma, was not only the principal object which engaged his thoughts, but the only one capable of fixing his attention; her lovely image was ever before his eyes; and although he had scarcely ever heard the sound of her voice, his imagination fondly dwelt on the inexpressible sweetness of that charming smile, which had spoken to his heart more eloquently than an angel's tongue.

Such were his musings as he rode slowly towards Mordeford; for every step which removed him farther from the mansion of Fitz Payne, seemed to increase the dejection and languor of his mind. And, as love grows warm, friendship commonly grows

grows cold; so Devereux, though far from being indifferent to the feelings of his friends, which had so lately prompted him to unusual exertions, perceived that his anxiety on their account was no longer capable of affecting him in the same lively manner; but had yielded to a superior influence, which now irresistibly governed his mind.

He had intended to reach Mordeford Castle the same evening, but darkness overtook him before he was aware of it; and he was aroused from a reverie, in which he had been thus perfectly abstracted from every other impression, besides that which had been indelibly fixed in his mind by Emma Fitz Payne, by one of his attendants telling him, that he was certain they must have got out of the right road; and should be in danger of not finding it again, if they did not immediately endeavour to return, whilst a glimmering of daylight yet remained.

Devereux felt, for a moment, ashamed of

of his inattention, and endeavoured to resume his wonted animation; but the attempt was in vain. He turned his horse's head, indeed, the opposite way, and tried to discover at what point he had deviated from the track they ought to have pursued; but soon relapsed into the same state of indifference to every thing around him, and continued to ride along, as if regardless which way he was going.

This absence and indifference could not escape the observation of his attendants; they had, indeed, perceived its gradual increase, as they advanced on their journey; and one of them, who had noticed the uncommon attention which his master had paid to the daughter of Sir Arthur Fitz Payne, was not altogether at a loss to account for so remarkable and sudden a change in the temper of Devereux.

Perhaps the fellow knew what it was to experience similar sensations; for love is not confined to any rank or condition of life, and only affects different minds in a

different manner, according to the degree of pliability or fitness to receive its impressions, which may prevail at particular periods of life, and under various circumstances, which sometimes augment, and sometimes diminish its powers of attraction, but which (however seemingly connected with them) are wholly independent of the distinctions of poverty and riches, dignity and meanness, or even those of beauty and deformity.

Yes, reader, this is really the truth, whether you are pleased with it or not.

Devereux, who always treated his servants with kindness, had never encouraged them to familiarity; his attendant, therefore, although he had accidentally, or perhaps intuitively, discovered the secret cause of his master's disorder, did not presume to make any suggestion to him on the subject; but perceiving that they were likely to be again benighted, in consequence of it, and without much chance of meeting with the same friendly shelter

which

which they had experienced at Kingsbury, proposed that they should mend their pace, in order to regain the main road; and as soon as they arrived at an opening in the lane, through which they had been long travelling, boldly called out, that he now remembered the road perfectly well, and requested Devereux to permit him to lead the way.

The guide not being at this time under an influence similar to that which disinclined his master from making much expedition during the day, now hastened as fast as he could, towards a light which he saw at a great distance; for, notwithstanding his assertion, he knew no more about the course they were travelling, than Devereux himself had done; and only stood a better chance of arriving at some certainty about it, because they now rode faster than before.

As they approached towards the light, they thought that it seemed to recede from them, with a sort of undulatory motion, which

which rendered it sometimes very indistinct; but it was presently again stationary, and appeared like a taper gleaming through a cottage window, which they began to hope was not far off.

They were, however, passing over an extensive plain, and the ground was so soft and yielding, that they were not altogether without apprehensions of falling into a morass; or one of those dangerous quagmires, which are often to be met with in such situations. Still keeping the light in view, and steering their course by it as nearly as the country would allow, they were greatly disappointed to find that they had gained but little ground; and the light which, after having disappeared for a moment, again resumed its station in the imaginary cottage window, seemed to be even as far from them as when they first perceived it.

The servant who had acted as a guide, now felt a considerable degree of alarm and uneasiness. He feared to go forward, lest

lest he should go wrong, and was equally unwilling to expose himself to the displeasure of Devereux, by acknowledging his ignorance of the road.

It was now getting late, and the night was become exceedingly dark, insomuch, that it was with difficulty they could avoid riding against one another, and at the same time guard themselves individually from being lost, by a too distant separation.

The light again seemed to move; and Devereux, starting as from a dream, beheld it evidently taking a direction different from that in which they had before been travelling. That he might be quite certain of the fact, he desired his attendants to halt for a few minutes; when shutting his eyes, he kept himself steady on the saddle, without altering his position, or suffering his horse to move; and on again looking forward, he clearly perceived that the light had traversed a considerable space, and was again stationary nearly at

right

right angles from the place where they had before seen it, with regard to the spot on which they were now standing.

The guide freely confessed that he was entirely ignorant which way they ought to go, and entreated Devereux to pardon the mistake which he had made about the road.

"It is all my own fault, Richard," replied the conscious youth; "but the worst of it is, that there seems to be no remedy for us but patience, unless the mist should disperse, and we can get a sight of the moon, and then I shall scarcely know which way we ought to steer."

"I wish," replied the servant, "that instead of coming upon this moor, we had turned to the right, and gone back again towards Abbotsford."

At the sound of the name, Devereux involuntarily sighed—"It is too late now to attempt it, Richard!"

"Oh yes, Sir; Abbotsford must be twenty or thirty miles distant."

Devereux

Devereux again heaved a deep sigh.—"Have you no notion where we are?" said Devereux.

"None at all now, Sir; I did think, just before it grew dark, that we were not far from that part of the country where we took the two robbers at the old woodman's cottage; but I am quite lost at present."

The light was now evidently moving towards them with considerable speed; they therefore again advanced, and at length came so near to it, that they were unanimously of opinion it must be one of those clumsy lanthorns made of sheepskin, which the peasants, at that time, were accustomed to use, but of a larger size than ordinary. They hailed the person whom they supposed was carrying it, as loud as they could, but no answer was returned. They holloed again, but could obtain no reply.

The light once more advanced towards them,

them, and then in a moment entirely disappeared.

Scarcely had they proceeded fifty yards, before the deceitful and tantalizing vision again attracted their attention, as nearly as they could guess, about the spot where it first appeared; and which, from the distance they had travelled, ought to have been by this time far behind them.

"Surely," said Devereux, "this is more vexatious than Merlin's black spirit; for that at least amused him with conversation; but ours is a sulky spirit, even worse than a ghost, for you see it will not answer when it is spoken to."

Devereux had scarcely ceased speaking, when his horse stumbled over something of considerable size, and nearly fell. At the same instant the light again disappeared. It was an awkward coincidence. Devereux was wholly exempt from the impression of it, (he had been well taught by his father); but it was seriously felt by his attendants.

"Here

"Here is something lying in the way," said Devereux. He dismounted. One of the servants intreated him to remain on horseback, in a tone indicative of fear and terror; the other took the reins of his horse, without alighting.

It was too dark to distinguish the object on the ground—it was of considerable size. Devereux touched it with his foot. A short sigh first, and afterwards a hoarse but gentle groan, startled Devereux, but almost petrified his attendants.

"Dismount this instant," said Devereux; "here is some poor soul breathing his last." He would have raised the dying person from the ground, but on attempting to lift him up, found that he had taken hold of an expiring sheep.

"It is an untoward adventure," said Devereux, "but there is no danger in it; besides, what have the guiltless to do with fear?"

He perceived the trepidation of his attendants, and their reluctance to dismount,

in

in pursuance of his orders. One of them was just setting his foot on the ground, when Devereux announced that it was a sheep, and not a man; the other was then at his side in an instant. The imaginary danger was over, and they were as bold as lions.

"Richard," said Devereux, "with more asperity than he was accustomed to, "you did not tremble and hesitate so much when we galloped into Glandon Tower, nor when we seized the robbers at the cottage in the wood."

"No, Sir, but then I could see what I was about, and knew what sort of an enemy I had to deal with."

"That ought not to have made any difference," replied Devereux; "true courage is uniform in its effects; light and darkness are the same; and as it knows not what fear is, the notion of danger, whether open or concealed, is alike indifferent: but they are no better than cowards, who must first know the quantity of danger,

danger, before they can make up their minds to encounter it."

"I should be very sorry to be a coward, Sir," answered Richard, somewhat piqued; "but I would rather, a thousand times, have been in all the battles that *bold Bohun* has fought, than I would ride over this moor again at such a time of night. Indeed, Sir, I cannot help it; but I would rather face a lion by day, than a mouse by night."

"I am sorry for you," said Devereux, "because courage ought not to have any thing to do with constitution, and every man ought to acquire it, in the same manner as he learns how to ride on horseback, by a little instruction, and a great deal of practice; and, therefore, I look upon the want of it to be a fault rather than a misfortune, and you have lost much of my former good opinion, by your behaviour to-night."

"I hope you will forgive me, Sir," said Richard, "for pretending to say a word to you;

you; but surely there is a great difference between fighting courage, and that sort of courage which does not belong to fighting."

"Every one who has real courage," rejoined Devereux, "is equally ready to fight or to let it alone, just as honour and duty call or forbid, without asking questions, or looking after consequences. I have a notion, that what you mean by fighting courage, is merely that sort of arrogance, which is rather the effect of conscious superiority of strength, or knowledge of the absence of danger, than the honourable attribute which alone deserves the name of courage. A variety of circumstances may render a man more or less disposed, at one time or another, to rush into the heat of battle, and defy the dangers which encompass him; but this has nothing at all to do with courage, which is the prompt and immediate, and yet dispassionate exercise of one uniform and consistent principle, the very reverse of fear;

fear; and which is at all times equally ready to defend its possessor, or any other person, against injuries, oppressions, and violence, by whomsoever threatened or practised, and equally whether directed against his life, his property, or his fame. He who shrinks in such a case, and I make no distinction, whether it be the case of himself or of his friend, is a coward, whom no excuses can justify; nor can any pretended excellences of disposition atone for his disgraceful pusillanimity.

" What have we to do with vain and imaginary terrors? Are the faculties of our minds to be subdued and paralysed by the slavish principle of fear, when the voice of duty calls? When the distressed and the destitute claim our assistance, are we to stand still, and calculate the chances of encountering some possible evil, in attempting their succour and relief, when he that dwelleth in Heaven hath expressly told us—" *Thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night, nor for the arrow that*

flieth by day; for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the sickness that destroyeth at noon-day! Thou shalt go on the young lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou tread under thy feet. Fear not, neither be dismayed, for Jehovah shall be thy confidence; and the Lord of Hosts thy strength."

The seriousness with which Devereux pronounced these sentences, the darkness of the night, the solemnity of the scene which the minds of his attendants had just before pictured, and of the idea of which they could scarcely yet divest themselves, all concurred to increase its sublime effect.

CHAP

CHAP. VIII.

Devereux being remounted, spurred his horse forward in a direct line, as nearly as he could, in hopes of reaching the boundary of the plain, on which he and his attendants had now passed so many anxious hours, and, as he rightly conjectured, without making any considerable progress on their journey; for the light by which they had been so repeatedly deceived, was only one of those gaseous vapours, which arise commonly enough in moist places; and being wafted about near the surface of the ground, often mislead the way-worn traveller; who, amidst the in-

tense darkness of the night, joyfully turns his longing eyes towards every luminous appearance, in hopes that it may direct his wandering steps into some beaten track, by which, happily, he may reach his journey's end.

Such was the information which Devereux obtained from a cottager, to compensate the disappointment of having passed the whole night among the mire and rushes of the moor, which he had traversed in almost every direction, without being able to find any road, until the thick fog was dispersed by the influence of the morning sun.

That glorious luminary, before whose splendid presence the clouds majestically receded, sprinkling the dusty ground, which they had so long overshadowed, with many a parting tear, though highly gratifying to Devereux and his companions, indicated, on its first appearance in the morning, one of those stormy and tempestuous days which appal the heart of the

the traveller, about the time of the autumnal equinox.

At the early dawn, they were on that side of the moor which was the most distant from the road they had to pursue. The mire and bogs which they were again to encounter, almost disheartened them from attempting to return by that route; but their ignorance of the geography of the country, deterred them from endeavouring to find any other track, by which they might avoid the inconveniences that had already so much fatigued and harrassed both themselves and their horses.

There was no other remedy, as Devereux again observed, but patience; and it must be confessed, that a large portion of it seemed to be requisite on the present occasion, for the horses were scarcely able to walk; and by the time they had again crossed the moor, the rain fell in torrents, while the wind blowing full in their faces, was sufficiently powerful almost to inter-

rupt the march of an army; and there was no chance of procuring any shelter, but the wretched accommodation of a peasant's hut, and its contiguous shed for their horses.

Thither, however, they hastened, if the pace at which they were now able to travel could be so described; and there the increasing violence of the storm compelled them to remain during several hours. The rain descended with the most tremendous impetuosity; the howling of the wind, scarcely less awful than when, with tropical violence, it sweeps away the produce of bountiful nature, the laboured works of art, and even the inhabitants of whole hamlets, in one dreadful and undistinguished scene of ruin and devastation, threatened the cottage and themselves with destruction; while the shed, under which their horses had been reluctantly driven, tottered on the decaying posts, which scarcely sustained the weight of the roof,

and

and seemed every moment ready to overwhelm the poor animals in its expected fall. Barley-bread was the only sustenance to be procured in the cottage; and the half-famished children around him, exhibited to the gentle-hearted Devereux, such a melancholy picture of indigence, as he had perhaps never before witnessed.

Scantily fed on the coarsest fare, destitute of clothes to cover them, and even of an habitation capable of affording shelter from the wind and rain, their lot seemed to be peculiarly hard. Providence seemed to have denied them a share in the common comforts of existence; and whilst, with lavish hand, riches, splendour, and dominion, were bestowed upon many who had no better title to such possessions than they, the bitter cup of misery appeared to be their only portion.

The storm having at length exhausted its violence, Devereux once more attempted to proceed on his journey, but not be-

fore he had given the wretched inhabitants of the cottage a proof of his commiseration, by distributing among them all the money he had about him.

The scene he had witnessed was not calculated to raise his spirits, already unusually depressed by fatigue; and the state of his mind assisted that fatigue, in producing a serious illness, of which he began to feel the attack. It was with great difficulty that he kept his seat on horseback; the servants perceived an alarming change in his countenance, and were greatly distressed. They were many miles distant from Mordeford Castle, and the road by which they were travelling was dreary and unfrequented.

To increase their difficulties and embarrassment, the rain which had fallen, had increased every rivulet to the size of a river, and deluged almost all that part of the country which they must necessarily pass through.

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To proceed much farther was impossible; the illness of Devereux increased; and while one of his attendants walked by his side, and assisted in supporting him on his horse, the other occasionally quitted the direct road, in hopes of finding some habitation, to which his master might be conveyed.

At length they approached the Severn, now swollen into a sea; its turbid waters, which covered the meadows on either side, bore on their surface melancholy indications of the damage which had been done by the recent storm; stacks of hay, implements of husbandry, pieces of timber, and portions of huts and cottages, swept away by the inundation.

On the verge of what was now become the river's brink, though a few days before remotely distant from its course, stood a neat mansion,

"Bosomed high in tufted trees;"

and affording an appearance of comfort, rather than magnificence.

The servant of Devereux anxiously approached it, and entreated, of an elderly matron who came to the door, that a sick traveller might be allowed to rest himself there.

The request was immediately granted, and with that cheerfulness of manner and unaffected urbanity, which greatly enhanced the value of the favour.

The servant returned to the road, and assisted in conducting Devereux to the house, where he was most kindly received. The lady of the mansion perceiving, by the respect paid to him, that he must be a person of rank, requested to be informed of the name of her guest. On being told that he was the son of the Earl of Hereford—"Gracious Heaven!" said she, "do I behold the son of my benefactor, and am I thus afforded an opportunity of shewing my gratitude to that noble general, for his kindness to me! A thousand times

times welcome to Belton Grove! Every comfort around me, I owe to the generosity of your excellent father; and although I am truly sorry for your present illness, I think myself blessed, by being thus enabled to make some small return, for what the Earl of Hereford has done for me and mine."

Devereux was too much indisposed to enter into a conversation; and being immediately conveyed to a comfortable apartment, was laid on the bed, a posset prepared for him, and every assistance administered which friendship could suggest, for the relief of his complaints.

It was the intention of Devereux, that one of his servants should have proceeded to Mordeford, to apprise his father of the occasion of his being detained on the road, and in order to remove the uneasiness which his absence would otherwise excite; but it was wholly impracticable to execute

execute such a design, on account of the overflowing of the Severn.

The widow De la Poer, to diminish the anxiety of Devereux on this head, suggested, that his friends could not be ignorant of the state of the roads, and the impossibility of fording the river at present, and therefore would naturally attribute his delay to the floods.

Devereux struggled with the fever for several days, during which period, he was attended by the hospitable matron, with incessant kindness and solicitude. His servants watched by him alternately; and one of the monks of Evesham, who accidentally came to Belton Grove, assisted, by his skill in medicine, to bring the disorder to a crisis.

He caused a number of herbs, of which, however, the principal were sage and marjoram, to be boiled in wine, and mingled with a portion of treacle, thus making what the monk termed an apozeme. The sudorific

sudorific effect of this medicine, tended more than any thing to subdue the violence of the disorder, which, at length, yielded to the influence of the remedies employed, or perhaps, the natural strength of the patient's constitution.

The fever left him, but he was reduced to a state of such extreme weakness, that although there no longer remained any danger with regard to his life, it was not at all probable that he would be able to remove from the Grove for a considerable time.

The waters were now abating, and as soon as the river was sufficiently subsided to have again become fordable, Devereux, no longer opposed by his hostess, dispatched one of the servants to Mordeford Castle, with an account of his illness, together with the particulars of the information he had obtained respecting the death of Agnes, as before related; desiring that he would commend him to all the family at Mordeford, and entreat the Earl, his father,

father, to enable him to make some suitable return, for the hospitality and attentions he had experienced at Belton Grove.

The recovery of Devereux was progressive, but it seemed to be retarded by a sort of melancholy abstraction, which appeared to increase as his disorder went off. It would have given great uneasiness to the benevolent matron, who had so kindly nursed him, if she had not, in the course of his illness, been furnished with a sort of clue, by which she was led to a discovery of the cause of it.

Devereux, during the continuance of his disorder, had been frequently delirious, and amidst the rhapsodies of incoherence which he then uttered, had confused the story of the hermit with the military operations at Warkworth Castle, and the black spirit of the Wye with the scenery at Kingsbury Place; but he had also so repeatedly and so emphatically called upon Emma Fitz Payne, as to leave no room for doubting that she was the object of a ten-

der

der attachment, which the knowledge and experience of the good widow De la Poer informed her was capable of producing such effects, as those which were more and more observable in Devereux, as he advanced in the recovery of his health.

The prospect from the windows of his apartment was delightful—the Severn gliding through the meadows, now recovered from the encroachments of the stream, the distant hills of Malvern, and the Alpine ridge of the black mountains, boldly indenting the horizon, formed the outlines of a picture, which, in every part of it, was filled up with objects charmingly diversified, and most interesting in their effect.

Devereux, who a few weeks before would have been enchanted with such a scene, now beheld it almost with indifference. He admired the Severn, principally because he thought the course of it resembled that of the stream which skirted the grounds of Abbotsford; and his imagination

gination roved from the objects before his eyes, to the figure of the beautiful Emma, when, with inimitable grace, she waved her hand, as he rode from the gate of her father's castle.

That sweet smile, never to be forgotten, which dimpled her lovely cheeks, the elegant simplicity of her attire, and the *tout ensemble* of a galaxy of charms, which none but a lover would have sufficient patience to recount, but of which each one would be sufficient to furnish that lover with a whole life of extatic contemplation, effaced from the mind of Devereux, the hills, the fields, the river; and fixed his imagination on her alone, for whom he wished to live, and whom alone he thought worth living to obtain.

The good widow De la Poer in vain attempted to rally Devereux out of his low spirits, as she properly enough termed these fits of abstraction, in which he sat sighing amidst the most chearful scenery, apparently regardless of the desire of every

every one around him to contribute to his happiness.

For some time she had been afraid of giving him offence by such an obtrusion, and, therefore, avoided alluding to the subject which she sagaciously conjectured was the chief occupier of his thoughts; but finding that his melancholy increased, and had an evident effect in retarding his recovery, the worthy matron assumed greater freedom; and on the first day that Devereux was able to quit his chamber, put in execution the determination she had made, to ascertain whether her conjectures were well founded or not.

As they were talking of the various inhabitants of the principal mansions in that part of the country, she asked Devereux if he had ever met with the family of Fitz Payne?

"Fitz Payne!" stammered Devereux; "Sir Arthur Fitz Payne, of Abbotsford?"

"The same," said the old lady; "it is a charm-

a charming family. The Lady Fitz Payne is an excellent woman, and they have two lovely daughters."

Devereux sighed; but instantly endeavouring to recollect himself, the blood flushed into his cheeks, and fully confirmed the suspicion of the widow De la Poer.

"I was very lately at Abbotsford Castle," said Devereux, assuming an air of as much indifference as possible.

"I thought so," said the old lady.

Devereux scarcely dared venture to look at her.

"It is a very dull place," continued the widow, "and I am not surprised that it should have made you low spirited; to live at Abbotsford, would make me quite melancholy."

Devereux a little recovered himself—"I did not think it so very gloomy when I was there," said he, "though I had just before seen Kingsbury Place."

"Oh no!" replied the old lady, looking full in his face; "it is not altogether the place,

place, I believe, but it is the air or something, for the melancholy seems to come upon one after having quitted the spot—did you not find it so?"

Devereux did not know what to think of the conversation; his face was again as red as crimson.

"Do you feel unwell, Mr. Devereux?" said the old lady.

"I am unusually warm this afternoon."

"You appear so, Sir. Pray were the young ladies at Abbotsford, when you were there?"

Devereux replied, that they were.

"My reason for asking," said the old lady, "was, because it was sometime ago almost resolved upon, that the eldest should go into a convent."

At the word convent, every drop of blood instantly forsook the cheeks of Devereux, but the widow did not seem to notice his confusion. "It would be a shame," continued she, "to hide such a face as that of Emma Fitz Payne, with the veil.

veil. Do you not think her very handsome?"

"Yes, Madam," replied Devereux, scarcely knowing what he said; and still in doubt, whether the question were dictated by simplicity or artifice.

"And yet," continued the matron, "there are persons who prefer the youngest; to be sure, Priscilla is a fine girl, but then Emma has such beautiful eyes and teeth; and when she smiles—if you had ever seen her smile, Sir, I am sure you would never have been low-spirited afterwards."

Devereux could bear this no longer—"My good lady," said he, "have some compassion; I have seen her smile; perhaps it were better that I had not. I confide to you the secret, that I love and adore Emma Fitz Payne, above every woman upon earth; but I conjure you not to tantalize me any more. Pray tell me, is there any such design as that you hinted at, of sending her into a convent?"

"There

"There was, I can seriously assure you," replied the old lady; "and, therefore, I advise you to lay aside these melancholy fits, which prevent your recovery, and get well as soon as you can, that you may change her father's resolution. A young man of your figure and expectations may do any thing. Besides, did you not tell me the other day, that you knew the Fitz Parnells? They can influence Sir Arthur Fitz Payne in a moment. If the good old Earl of Clifford were still alive, and in England, I could bring the matter about myself."

"Did you know the nobleman you speak of, Madam?" said Devereux, eager at once to change the conversation, and desirous of hearing something of so extraordinary a personage.

"I knew him in my youth," replied the widow De la Poer, "when he was one of the most accomplished men of the age. I can just remember his entertaining King John, and all the court, at Kingsbury, just

just after signing the Great Charter. Six barons carried the King on their shields, into the great hall. There was a conduit in the court-yard, which ran with wine; and when the King went away, Clifford presented him with a fine horse, and a rich saddle, with stirrups of massy gold."

Devereux mentioned the surprise with which he had seen the preparations for supper, still so carefully preserved at Kingsbury.

"His was, indeed, a grievous disappointment," said the old lady.

"The servant," continued Devereux, "did not seem disposed to relate the particulars, but said, that a sad accident had happened; and mentioned, that the person who was suspected of an intention to poison the company, destroyed himself."

"He did," said the widow De la Poer, "but not before he had accomplished part of his purpose—did not the man tell you of the death of Lady Anne?"

"No," replied Devereux.

"The Earl was on the point of being married to the daughter of Montgomery of Powis," continued the old lady, "and she actually partook of the poison, and died. Clifford himself escaped, through the fidelity of an old servant, who gave him notice of the plot, but not until it was too late to save the life of Lady Anne. The Earl soon afterwards went abroad, and it has been reported that he was assassinated at Rome.

"He was a near relation of Montfort, and the Fitz Parnells, and they were always intimate friends of Sir Arthur Fitz Payne; so you see the steps by which I wanted to climb into favour on your account; but if your father is agreeable to the match, let him make proposals at once. Rank and power are every thing with Sir Arthur; and your father's title will weigh much more in the mind of Fitz Payne, than the affections of his daughter, or all the merit in the world on your part, if unaccompanied by riches and honours."

"Perhaps it may be fortunate for me then," said Devereux, "that Sir Arthur served under my father at Damietta, and he therefore knows him well."

"Chear up then, my young friend," said the good matron; "you have no reason to be afraid of the event of his application, and I will not suffer you to indulge in melancholy thoughts; for nothing contributes half so much to the recovery of health, as chearfulness and good humour."

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

The company at Mordeford Castle received, as might be expected, the intelligence of the illness of Devereux, with great concern. They had previously attributed his delay to the condition of the roads, having themselves witnessed the effects of the late storms, which had been very generally felt throughout the country.

The Earl of Hereford had been making preparations for his departure, intending to set out with Merlin for Ashbury, as soon as his son rejoined them at Mordeford Castle.

Since his acquaintance with the hermit, (for so we must still call him) he had been induced to use more exercise on foot, than he had for many years been accustomed to, and being subject to the gout, the dampness of the ground, in consequence of the late heavy rains, had produced one of the severest attacks of that painful disorder which he had ever suffeerd.

The Earl was confined to his bed, when the messenger arrived from Belton Grove; and the intelligence of the illness of Devereux, by distressing his mind, increased his indisposition.

He was unable to set his foot on the floor, and therefore, it was impossible to attempt to visit his son; and although assured by the messenger that Devereux was not only out of danger, but that there was no reason to fear a return of the disorder, his anxiety almost overbalanced his patience.

Bohun also felt scarcely less concern than Hereford himself. He had conceived a great

a great regard for Devereux, who had endeared himself to Sir Humphrey, equally by his vivacity and courage, and that noble and generous spirit which the worthy knight, without arrogating to himself the possession of it, could not but be conscious was very similar to his own.

"Merlin," said Bohun, "suppose we leave my good Lord Hereford to the care of Sir Hugh de Bolebec, and pay a visit to our young friend? You are a sort of idle man, now you have no controversies to decide in Holme-wood, under the Druid's oak; and after a few days, I can return to Mordeford Castle, with intelligence what progress we have made in recovering him. He has a good constitution, and has lived temperately, therefore let us hope for the best; besides, you understand medicine better than half the hospitallers, and I will make him follow your prescriptions."

Merlin was at first divided in his mind, whether he should leave his friend the

Earl, but the entreaty of the latter decided his resolution. There was nothing unusual in the disorder by which he was attacked, but its degree of violence; he had much more anxiety on his son's account than his own, and assured Merlin, that he had no doubt it would contribute to his own cure, when he had the satisfaction of knowing that Devereux was comforted by the presence of so experienced a friend.

"Proceed, therefore, to get ready immediately," said Bohun; "you shall ride one of my mules, which will carry you not only safely but easily, and Richard shall return to shew us the way."

The Earl of Hereford recollected the worthy matron, at whose mansion his son had been so hospitably entertained; but as the kindness for which she had expressed herself so grateful was only what he considered the strict line of his duty, he had scarcely given the circumstance a moment's thought, from the time of its occurrence,

currence, which was many years before, until it was recalled to his memory, by the communication which he received from Devereux.

In the barons' wars, it so happened that a party of the insurgents were in the very act of seizing upon the mansion of Belton Grove, for the purpose of plunder, when the Earl of Hereford, passing that way with a party of troops, gallantly attacked the marauders, and having completely routed them, left a detachment of his men to guard the house and its inhabitants from any future assault.

Belton had been, for more than a century, the residence of the De la Poers, a family respectable for their descent, but moderately opulent. Philip, the then proprietor, was at that moment a prisoner among the Allobroges, into whose hands he had fallen as he was returning from the crusade.

A few years before, he had espoused the daughter of John de Glanville; and being

thus deprived of her husband, she resided at Belton Grove, in a sort of premature widowhood.

De la Poer was liberated from his confinement, and returned to England, but survived only a few years, leaving his widow, who still lived at Belton Grove, and never forgot that she was indebted for the possession of it, to the kindness and valour of the Earl of Hereford; although she had never had any opportunity of making a return for the obligation, until the arrival of Devereux at the mansion, at a time when he so much stood in need of assistance.

Merlin, who had for some time laid aside his fantastical dress, and assumed a habit less remarkable, inured to all the vicissitudes of our changeable climate, and possessed of more strength and activity than are usually to be met with, in men who had not seen more than half the number of his years, was soon equipped for his journey; and Bohun, partly to inspirit

spirit the Earl of Hereford before their departure, and partly from the natural love of humour, did not fail to jest with the hermit, on the metamorphosis which they had accomplished.

"Aye, now," said he, "you look like a Christian, and I see nothing of the conjuror remaining, besides the beard. Perhaps we may get that trimmed into modern form before we come back."

"I have been thinking," said Merlin, "that as the Earl is desirous of going to Ashbury, as soon as he can bear the journey, it will be better for me to remain at the Grove with Devereux, until he is able to travel, and my Lord may then come to us in his way home; for if I am not mistaken, Belton Grove is almost in the direct line towards Ashbury."

"And pray, how should a hermit know any thing about roads?" said Sir Humphrey, smiling.

"If a hermit do not," retorted Merlin, "surely a conjuror may."

Sir Hugh de Bolebec here interposed; and after expressing his hopes that the recovery of Devereux, as well as the Earl of Hereford, would enable them speedily to pursue their intended journey, suggested an alteration in their plan, which, he said, he was sure would meet with the concurrence of his friend Bohun, and, he trusted, would not be objected to by either of the party. It was, that as Glandon Tower was situated at no great distance from the road by which both the Earl and Devereux must travel, on their return to Ashbury, whether they went from Mordeford or from Belton Grove, they should meet under his roof once more, to accept his thanks for the restoration of that happiness for which he was so much indebted to them all, and particularly to Merlin. "If you agree to this proposal," said Bolebec, "as soon as Sir Humphrey brings us intelligence that Devereux has strength to perform the journey, my family shall set out for Glandon,

to

to prepare for your reception; and I trust that the Earl of Hereford will, by that time, be sufficiently recovered to accompany you, Sir Humphrey, and meet his son once more in Bernwood Forest."

"I have no objection to any thing but delay," said Bohun; "but as hermits seldom travel very fast, I must leave my good Lord and yourself, to make any arrangements you think proper, while we proceed without loss of time to Belton Grove. Come, Merlin, you say you know the road; pray lead the way."

Bohun and Merlin quitted Mordeford Castle, both equally anxious to reach Belton, at least some time the next day.

The weather was still tempestuous, and heavy showers frequently fell; but neither of the travellers suffered much inconvenience from wind or rain. Merlin had been constantly accustomed to them in his abode at the hermitage, and Sir Humphrey's buff coat bade defiance to "the pelting of the pitiless storm." The roads

were deep, but the knight and his companion were well mounted—Merlin, on a fine Spanish mule, and Sir Humphrey, on one of his strongest steeds. They were attended by three servants, for the Earl of Hereford insisted on attaching to Merlin one of his own domestics; and if the journey had been even twice as long, its wearisomeness would have been but little, if at all perceived, so completely was the time occupied by conversation; for Merlin possessed an inexhaustible source of information, and the vivacity of Bohun, and his fertility of invention, were perpetual incitements to wit, ingenuity, and good humour.

Sir Marmaduke Langdale had a castle, near which they were to pass, and Bohun proposed to sleep there. He supposed that the family were absent, but having been long acquainted with the knight, he knew that the doors of Stoke were always open to himself and his friends.

On their arrival, Sir Humphrey was agreeably

agreeably surprised to find that Langdale, accompanied by several of his friends, among whom was Bohun's particular acquaintance, Sir William Fitz Osborne, had returned to Stoke Castle the day before. He had not seen him since they met at Glandon Tower, on the return of Bolebec, at the termination of the civil war, Langdale having been absent almost ever since, in a distant part of the country.

Sir Marmaduke had once seen Merlin at Mordeford Castle, but it was not probable that he would recognize the hermit in his present dress; and in case of a discovery being made, either by the curiosity of any of the company, or the inadvertency of Merlin, Bohun promised himself no small share of entertainment.

On entering the house, he took Merlin by the hand, and presented him to Sir Marmaduke and his guests, as one of his best friends, but did not mention any name. Langdale bowed respectfully, but took no particular notice of the stranger, besides

besides that which was the result of his natural generosity of disposition.

The days were now considerably diminished in length, and the unusual quantity of rain that had fallen, increased the gloominess of the season.

Stoke Castle, which had been constructed for security more than for comfort, was always dismal. The apartments received all their light by narrow windows, so high up in the walls, that even if they had not opened into the area of the building, they would not have afforded to those within, the least glimpse of the scenery which surrounded them. This disadvantage was in some measure compensated by the hospitality of the possessor. The fire, bright blazing, illuminated the ample hall, whilst a plentiful board, and a hearty welcome, invited the guests to partake of the generosity of Sir Marmaduke Langdale, who was one of the most considerable among those who so gallantly signalized themselves under Prince Edward; and for his

prowess

prowess was made a banneret, on the day of the famous battle of Evesham.

The exhilarating goblet circulated freely. Bohun sported his jests, and related his humourous anecdotes; and Merlin occasionally astonished the company with his shrewd and sagacious remarks, but he remained undiscovered.

Langdale was occupied by general attentions to his guests. There was, indeed, among them, one John de Burgh, an old commander, who had formerly served under Simon de Montfort, in the crusade led by that general against the Albigenses. In the course of the evening, this person frequently fixed his eyes on Merlin, with uncommon attention, but never once addressed him.

They retired to their chambers, and the next morning having taken leave of their friendly host, proceeded towards Belton Grove.

"Did you observe that old man who looked so earnestly at you last night?"

said Bohun, addressing himself to Merlin, as they rode along; "I thought he seemed to remember the hermit."

"No, Sir Humphrey," replied Merlin, "he might remember *me*, but I am sure he did not remember *the hermit*; for he never saw me in that dress; and if I had had on my old vest and cap, he could not have recollected me at all. Did you ever see him before, Sir Humphrey?"

"He has been at Mordeford Castle twice or three times," said Bohun, "which made me suppose that he might have seen you before."

"So he has, fifty years ago;" said Merlin; "and I remembered him very perfectly, though I never saw him since, until last night. He might have made a discovery which I wish to avoid at present; and indeed, every time he opened his lips, I expected to hear my own name."

"I have a great mind to go back to Stoke immediately," said Bohun, "but young Devereux may require some assistance;

ance; and I dare say De Burgh would not have been dumb all the evening, if he had perfectly remembered you."

Merlin changed the subject, and they pursued their journey. When within the distance of about a mile from Belton Grove, Richard was sent forward to apprise Devereux of their approach.

The evening was set in, and on their arrival they were immediately conducted to the apartment of Devereux, who had retired to his chamber just before.

The presence of his friends was a cordial to his spirits, by which they were momentarily relieved from that depression and languor to which, as was before observed, the disease had not so much contributed, as his visit to Abbotsford.

Not aware of this circumstance, however, Sir Humphrey Bohun felt a much greater degree of uneasiness on account of his young friend, than he expressed whilst in his presence. He attributed the remarkable change in Devereux, from the

utmost

utmost liveliness and gaiety of disposition, to a degree of serious pensiveness bordering on melancholy, to the debilitating influence of the fever, and was still alarmed for his safety.

Merlin, whose knowledge of diseases was entirely of the empirical kind, acquired by practical experience of the use of remedies, rather than from studying the mutual relationship of cause and effect, would perhaps have been excused, if, like many modern physicians, he had subscribed to the same opinion, merely because it was suggested to him, without any trouble of reflection or investigation on his own part; but he had a real regard for Devereux, and thought no pains too great by which he might render him service. Moreover, the recollection of a severe disease, by which he had himself been attacked, when about the same age as his friend, at a period when his mind was agitated by a conflict between hope and fear, suggested a doubt respecting the

case,

case, which had escaped the equally zealous but less observant Bohun.

After some time passed in mutual enquiries, and having explained the plan and intention of their visit, they withdrew from his chamber, exhorting Devereux to keep his mind in the most perfect tranquillity, and compose himself to rest; as sleep, above all things, would enable him to regain strength to conquer the distemper—"For," said Bohun, "I intend to make a very short campaign; and as soon as we have driven out the enemy, I shall leave the command of the garrison to Merlin, and return to head-quarters. The generals will be very impatient to begin their march towards Glandon Tower, as soon as they know that their confederates are ready to join them; as they expect that the gates will be set open to them, and they shall be admitted without any difficulty, like the men of Warkworth, under a certain officer of my acquaintance. Do you remember him, Devereux?"

They

They now retired. The widow De la Poer had prepared a repast for her new guest, and was waiting to receive them with great courtesy. She had never seen Bohun, though she was no stranger to his military fame.

The knight introduced Merlin, whose venerable figure seemed to attract particular attention; and they joined in returning thanks, for the kind and friendly manner in which the good matron had received and accommodated their friend.

She told them, in reply, that she considered herself indebted to the father of Devereux, for all the comforts which they saw around her; and added, that the obligation she was under to the Earl of Hereford, was increased, by the pleasure which their visit to Belton Grove afforded her.

Merlin made a remark on the evident dejection of his friend, which was the more alarming as it was unusual; and enquired if the recovery of his accustomed

vivacity,

vivacity, seemed to keep pace with the return of his strength?

"By no means," said the good woman, "rather the reverse; but I have talked to him on the subject, and I hope when the Earl of Hereford is made acquainted with the cause of it, we shall be able to find a remedy."

She spoke this with a smile, and Bohun immediately exclaimed—"My life on it, the boy is in love. Do you not think so, Merlin?"

"These things are all very natural, Sir Humphrey," continued the widow; "but I must entreat you to take no notice to the young gentleman, that I have said a word to you about it—he will think that I have betrayed his secret."

Merlin sighed.

"Come, come," said Bohun, "instead of sighing, we ought to rejoice. If this be the case, there is no reason to despair of a cure. In the mean time, Madam, as we have had a long journey, we will gladly

ly partake of what I perceive your goodness has provided for us."

They sat down to a plenteous repast, which was handsomely served, and soon afterwards retired to their respective apartments.

In the morning, at sun rising, Merlin visited his friend Devereux, and insisted on his accompanying him in his morning walk, which he continued to pursue as constantly as when he inhabited the hermitage. "If you find yourself fatigued," said the old man, "let one of the servants meet us with the mule on our return. He travels very safely; and although I have not rode for more than thirty years until I came hither, I am not at all fatigued by the length of the journey."

Devereux accordingly arose, and attended Merlin. The latter then enquired into the particulars of his illness, which imperceptibly led to an account of his adventure on the moor. "It was the unwholesomeness of that marshy ground,

and

and the midnight damps, which produced your complaint. I think nothing of the storm. It was not the wind nor the rain, but the vapours of the marsh, which occasioned all the mischief."

Devereux then related what he had observed respecting the light, together with the account which had been given of it by the cottager.

"There is nothing of this kind," said Merlin, "in Holme Wood, or in the Chase. I have passed whole nights in the open air, and in every season, but never saw any thing like it. The brilliant coruscations of the lightning used to play upon the summit of the hills, and fringed the groves as with sparkling diamonds; but there are no noxious exhalations there. The western breezes purify those woods, and the friendly Wye drains off every drop of superfluous moisture which the trees and herbage do not exhaust.

"I have formerly seen the moor you speak of," added Merlin; "it is, I believe,

lieve, the same place where tradition relates that part of a Roman legion stuck fast in a bog, and perished by famine, amidst the taunts of their enemies. Pray from what place had you travelled, that you were benighted in that spot?"

Devereux replied, that he had spent the preceding night at Abbotsford Castle; and in order to avoid any questions on the subject of his visit there, by an easy transition, passed to a description of the wonders which he had seen at Kingsbury.

This was a topic on which Merlin was not more disposed to converse, than Devereux was to be interrogated respecting the family of Fitz Payne.

The reader will probably have perceived, in the account which the hermit had given of himself, a coincidence with the story of the Earl of Clifford, which will have already prepared him for identifying the proprietor of the vast lordships of Kingsbury, in the recluse of Holme Wood.

Devereux had only just commenced his relation,

relation, when Merlin, who perceived the approach of the servant with the mule, desired him not to fatigue himself by too much conversation, and persuaded him to ride back to the Grove.

Sir Humphrey Bohun met them on their return, and exerted himself with so much success, to disperse the cloud which still hung over the mind of Devereux, that he became more chearful than he had been at any time since his arrival at Belton.

A sigh occasionally escaped him; but partly checked by the presence of Bohun, and the apprehension of a disclosure of the confession he had made to the widow De la Poer, respecting Emma Fitz Payne, he affected a degree of gaiety which was far from his heart, and was chearful, in direct opposition to his feelings.

CHAP. X.

In the evening, Bohun intimated his design to return to Mordeford Castle the next day, remarking, that by the time the Earl of Hereford was fit to travel, there could be no doubt that Devereux would be in a condition to join him on the road to Glandon. "I suppose," said the knight, "that Bolebec will lead the van. The Earl of Hereford and myself shall follow in a few days; and these two young gentlemen," alluding to Merlin and Devereux, "will do well to meet us at Chillingplace; unless they would prefer travelling by way of Oxford, in which case we

we could meet them at Sir Arthur Fitz Payne's, of Abbotsford Castle."

This was a home thrust for Devereux. He knew that he had never said one word to Sir Humphrey, which could have put him in mind of Abbotsford. He had indeed mentioned the name to Merlin, but in so cursory a manner, that it was not at all likely for him to have repeated what he had said. He thought that he perceived a sort of suppressed smile on the face of Bohun, when he named Sir Arthur Fitz Payne; and the idea that the widow had acquainted him with the discovery she had made, instantly occurred to him, and threw him into extreme confusion.

Merlin, however, unintentionally relieved him in some measure from his embarrassment, by saying that he should like to meet with Sir Nigel de Chillingplace again; "for," said he, "you may perhaps remember that he was one of my strongest supporters, when you disputed with me respecting the dragon of Mordeford,

ford, and spoke of him as contemptuously as Daniel did of old, respecting the Babylonish dragon."

Devereux hoped that the conversation would now be diverted into another channel; but Bohun, with provoking good humour, returned to the charge.

"So then, Merlin, you prefer going to Chillingplace; but let us hear what Devereux says; I have a notion that he would like better to visit Abbotsford Castle—would you not, my brave lad?"

At this instant Devereux was again favoured, by another interruption of the conversation: the widow De la Poer announced the arrival of her brother, whom she saw alighting at the door.

But the circumstance which thus afforded relief to one of the parties, from the attack of the humourous Bohun, threatened the other with still greater confusion, from the discovery which, the moment the stranger entered the room, Merlin perceived to be inevitable.

The

The widow of De la Poer had an only sister, whose marriage with John de Burgh had entitled him to the appellation by which she announced the arrival at Belton, of the same person who had so wistfully observed Merlin, when he was at Sir Marmaduke Langdale's.

Bohun, who when he had first noticed the attention with which De Burgh seemed to regard Merlin, had only suspected that he, perhaps, had some recollection of him in the character of a hermit, now felt his curiosity greatly increased, by the conversation which had passed on the road from Stoke Castle.

The visit of De Burgh to his sister-in-law, was almost accidental. He was desirous of seeing her before he returned into Wiltshire, where he usually resided, and had taken Belton Grove in his road thither; but without having either apprized her of his intention, or, indeed, without having determined upon it himself until the preceding evening.

Bohun, wholly unacquainted with the affinity between De Burgh and the widow of De la Poer, had not mentioned whither he was going when he left Stoke Castle; and they were therefore mutually surprised, at thus again meeting, in a place where neither of them had entertained the remotest idea of seeing the other.

When De Burgh entered the room, he made a profound reverence to Merlin; then starting at the sight of his old acquaintance Bohun, was for some time engaged in an explanation of the subject of their unexpected meeting, which necessarily involved some account of Devereux, to whom De Burgh next addressed himself, congratulating him on his recovery, and his sister on the satisfaction which, he said, he knew she must feel, in contributing to it.

Ever and anon, he cast his eyes on Merlin, with a sort of doubtful curiosity, more easily conceived than described. Merlin felt its force—and notwithstanding all

all his philosophy and stoicism, was unable to enter upon the conversation, which he expected every moment, with as much trepidation as that which Devéreux had felt, when Sir Humphrey Bohun was beginning to banter him respecting his visit to Abbotsford.

Bohun had purposely avoided addressing his friend by the familiar name of Merlin, as he usually called him, in hopes that the curiosity of De Burgh, being kept completely on the stretch, might induce him to begin a discourse with him; but perceiving that De Burgh looked as if he was under a kind of ceremonious restraint, which he could not account for, at length determined to proceed with his usual plainness, and therefore bluntly remarked —"I think, De Burgh, that you must have forgotten having been in company with my venerable friend, before you saw him at Stoke Castle."

Merlin looked confused; and De Burgh noticing his embarrassment, although he

supposed, from the intimacy which appeared to subsist between him and Bohun, that the latter would not have brought forward the subject unless with the approbation of his friend, was yet not quite certain that he ought to mention his suspicion that it was the Earl of Clifford, replied, in a hesitating manner—"There are few persons who have ever had the happiness of being in company with your friend, who can forget the pleasure of conversing with him; but it is so many years since the time at which I think that I had that honour, as to make me in some doubt respecting it."

"Have you any recollection, Sir," said Merlin, "whether it might be at Kelyngworth?"

"It was, my Lord," replied De Burgh; "and at that time I thought myself so near death, from the wounds I had received abroad, that I did not expect to have ever left the Earl of Leicester's Castle; much less, that I should again enjoy the

the pleasure of seeing your Lordship, at the end of fifty years."

Bohun was now in almost as much consternation as the woman of *Endor*, when the apparition which she herself had conjured up, announced that it was Saul who was her visitor.

Merlin's resemblance of Simon de Montford, which Sir Humphrey had so often talked of; the severe disappointment which the hermit himself had mentioned; the sudden death of the Lady Anne Montgomerie (it was supposed) by poison; followed by the as sudden disappearance of the Earl of Clifford, with whom she was on the point of marriage, concurred to identify his person, and prove that the poor hermit of Holme Wood could be none other than the Earl of Clifford himself.

Devereux looked at Bohun in silent astonishment, whilst the widow De la Poer was endeavouring to trace, in the lineaments of Merlin, the features of the Earl

of Clifford, which had not altogether escaped her recollection.

Clifford took De Burgh by the hand—"I never deny my name," said he, "but have had few opportunities of answering to it for many years. Bohun will tell you a thousand amusing stories, of my having been an inhabitant of Holme Wood, where I was a hermit; and of the metamorphosis, as he calls it, which the Earl of Hereford and himself have at length effected; but it seems to be his turn, at present, to feel the effect of surprise. Yet, bold Bohun," he continued, turning to the Knight, (who was really as much overpowered by astonishment, as Clifford and Devereux had just before been, by their respective emotions) "there is nothing magical in all this, nothing but what will admit of proof; it is not merely hearsay or tradition, but you have demonstrative evidence. It is not like the account of the black spirit, is it, Sir Humphrey?"

"It is indeed your turn, my dear Lord,"

said Bohun; "but I know not how to congratulate you on a discovery, which reflects so much disgrace on my sagacity; for I find that I have been at the threshold which led to it, a thousand times, and yet never had sense enough to find my way."

"So it happens to many wise men as well as you, my dear friend," replied the Earl; "but a secret once revealed, is never thought worth the trouble which has been taken to conceal it; it is like the inside of a Persian talisman, or Numidian obi, which contains a few feathers, a little hair, or a drop of blood, or the tooth of a snake: the wonder lies in the covering, and the jewellery which envelopes it. The thing hidden scarcely deserves a thought. Let us, therefore, either forget that there was any secret, or that it has ever been revealed.

"It was my intention to have mentioned my name, on quitting the hermitage, but no proper opportunity offered; or

rather, the kindness of my friends prevented my having any motive sufficient to compel me to break through the silly reluctance which I had to disclose it. I therefore reserved it until some future occasion; but when I least expected a discovery, my old acquaintance De Burgh is accidentally thrown in my way, and by breaking the bubble, has in one moment made you, Sir Humphrey, better acquainted with the person whom you have been fostering so long under the walls of Mordeford Castle, than an intimacy of twenty years."

The attention of Devereux had never been so completely abstracted from the subject which had almost incessantly occupied his mind, ever since he came to Belton Grove, as at the present moment; and he too, in some sort, participitated with Bohun, in the surprise that he himself should have heard the history of the hermit, as delivered at Mordeford, and of the Earl of Clifford, as related by the servant

vant at Kingsbury, without having once thought of comparing them together, without a single idea of the resemblance between them, or the exactness of the parallel.

He now perceived why the Earl of Clifford was unwilling to hear the relation of what he had seen at Kingsbury, although he could not conceive, at the time, why Merlin was so desirous to put an end to the conversation.

"My good Lord Clifford," said the widow De la Poer, "I have a twofold cause of rejoicing on the present occasion;—first, that I see you at Belton Grove, is a sincere satisfaction to the daughter of John de Glanville, who, in his lifetime, was honoured with your friendship;—secondly, on account of this young gentleman, to whose happiness you have it in your power to contribute, even more than you can perhaps at present imagine."

Devereux, who had been hesitating for some time, and in vain attempting to congratulate

gratulate his venerable friend, was now totally struck dumb, and would have left the room, but his legs forgot their office; and he found himself unable even to move from his chair.

The Earl of Clifford, who had entertained almost a fraternal affection for Glanville, although, until this moment, he did not know that the widow De la Poer was the daughter of his friend, returned the compliments of his kind hostess, by telling her—" that if he had not already felt the strongest inducement to serve and assist his friend Devereux, he should have thought it a duty which he owed to the memory of his beloved Glanville, to have promised an unconditional compliance with any suggestions which the daughter of so dear a friend could have made on his account."

" Well, my noble Earl," said Bohun, " I think you know me too well, to expect any compliments; and I know you too well, to think that you would be pleased

by

by any alteration in my usual freedom; therefore, I shall hasten back to Mordeford, and set my cellars open, as I always do when I hear good news; and Bolebec shall cut down Bernwood Forest, to make bonfires, and roast a whole herd of his black oxen, to celebrate the restoration of his son, by means of the hermit of Holmewood, and the finding of the Earl of Clifford, by means of honest Jack de Burgh."

Devereux, although agitated by such an unexpected occurrence, was rather benefited than injured by it; it had produced the sensation of fatigue, not of uneasiness, and he slept more soundly than usual.

Changing the name of Merlin, which had been given him by Bohun, for the title of Earl of Clifford, which he had received by right of inheritance, created not the smallest difference in the manners, sentiments, or feelings of the hermit, who arose

arose at the usual hour, and called for Devereux to accompany him in his walk.

Devereux attempted to apologize for his seeming neglect, to join the company in their tribute of respect, on the preceeding evening; and pleaded the confusion into which he had been thrown, by the raillery of Bohun, and the abruptness of the widow De la Poer.

"Say nothing more on the subject, my child," said the excellent old man; "I trust that the only change you will perceive in consequence of De Burgh's disclosure, will be an increase of humility, in one, who, in the assumed character of a hermit, might say and do many things without impropriety, which would be arrogant in the Earl of Clifford. And now, my dear friend, suffer me to pry a little into your affairs; but not without assuring you, that I would not do so, if I did not feel that they concern me, at least as much as my own. Tell me sincerely, if you

you know what the widow De la Poer alluded to, in her remark respecting the power which I have to promote your happiness?"

"It would be unworthy of your friendship," replied Devereux, "if I attempted to conceal any thing from your enquiries. I feel that it is weak and ridiculous to have tried, even for a moment, to disguise my feelings, of which I know no reason why I should be ashamed. Could I have summoned resolution enough to have candidly acknowledged the reason of that dejection, which you, and all my friends, must have perceived, I should not only have avoided ridicule, but that consciousness of deserving it, which makes me tremble even at the good-humoured raillery of Sir Humphrey Bohun."

He then proceeded to relate the circumstances of his visit to Sir Arthur Fitz Payne, and the impression which his mind received, on first seeing his accomplished daughter; and concluded with telling the Earl,

Earl, that the widow De la Poer, desirous of ascertaining the true cause of his melancholy, had, after many enquiries, succeeded in discovering his passion for Emma Fitz Payne; and that, in the course of the conversation which ensued, she had expressed her regret that the absence of the Earl of Clifford prevented the prospect which, through his influence, she thought that she could have procured, of a favourable reception in the family.

"Make yourself perfectly easy on that head," replied the good old Earl; "the widow De la Poer is a sensible woman, and seems to understand the disposition of Fitz Payne very well. You have no reason to doubt the concurrence of your father, and I will take care of the rest."

They took a very short walk this morning, on account of seeing Bohun before his departure for Mordeford; and on their return to the mansion, found the Knight earnestly engaged in conversation with the widow De la Poer. Devereux guessed, from

from their looks, that he was partly the subject of their discourse; but encouraged by the presence of Clifford, he felt much more composed than he had done the day before.

The widow had been entreating Sir Humphrey to use his influence with the Earl of Hereford, to induce him to honour her with his company at the Grove. The hospitable matron would have gladly offered accommodation to the Bolebec family, at the same time; but as their retinue was very numerous, she was obliged to confine her invitation to the Earl of Hereford, and Sir Humphrey Bohun, whom she entreated to conduct him to Belton Grove.

Bohun replied—" Your brother very well knows that old generals seldom sign a treaty, without some proviso of their own attached to it. The condition which I have to propose is, that you and De Burgh join the party to Glandon Tower; and, in that case, I will venture to undertake, that as

soon

soon as the Earl of Hereford is able to stir, he shall come to the Grove for a few days, on his way thither."

The widow made some excuses, on account of such an addition to the numerous company already invited to Glandon, but Bohun interrupted her—"Why, Madam, the Tower is large enough to accommodate an army: I consider the affair settled, and will set out immediately."

Then taking leave of the Earl of Clifford, Devereux, and De Burgh, he mounted his horse and rode off towards Mordeford.

Clifford took the earliest opportunity of conferring with the widow De la Poer, on the subject of Devereux, as he perfectly agreed with her respecting the disposition of Sir Arthur Fitz Payne, and the motives by which he was most likely to be influenced in the disposal of his daughter; and although he thought that a proposal from the Earl of Hereford would undoubtedly be received with great respect,

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he was aware that the possession of Kingsbury, whose domains almost surrounded Abbotsford, must always possess superior weight in the consideration of that family. He conceived, therefore, that without directly interfering at present, he might pave the way which must eventually lead to the success of Devereux, by renewing an intercourse with Fitz Payne.

For this purpose, without mentioning a word of his intention to Devereux, and having enjoined the widow to the strictest secrecy, he sent a messenger to Kingsbury Place, with instructions to the old servant there, to announce to the Abbot of Brierley his intended return; to require an immediate restitution of his lands, to those whom he should appoint to take possession of them; and to restore the original establishment at the mansion, and prepare every thing for his reception.

The messenger was charged to deliver the letter, without saying whence he came, and

and to return immediately to the Grove. He travelled all night, and arrived at Kingsbury at break of day. Having delivered the letter according to his instructions, without waiting for any reply, he struck into the track leading towards Oxford; and afterwards returning into the road to Belton, hastened back to the Grove.

The old servant, who was well acquainted with the hand-writing of the Earl, lost no time in setting out for Brierley; and as the road to the Abbey passed through the village of Abbotsford, he could not deny himself the gratification of imparting the joyful and important intelligence which he had received, to the family of Fitz Payne, knowing that they had been the most intimate friends of Simon de Montfort, and the Fitz Parnells, and must, therefore, feel an interest in whatsoever related to the interests of the family.

He found Sir Arthur Fitz Payne much distressed, by intelligence which had been just

just before brought to him, of the death of John Fitz Parnell, who had been so severely wounded, in a tournament held at Aix, in the presence of Louis, King of France, and his Court, that he died of his wounds in a few days.

The messenger who brought this information was a servant of the deceased Fitz Parnell, who, on his death-bed, had charged him with a letter to Sir Hugh de Bolebec, which he was strictly enjoined to deliver into his own hands. He had landed at Southampton, and having travelled to Abbotsford, to inform Sir Arthur Fitz Payne of the death of his master, was now gone to Glandon Tower with the letter to Bolebec.

On hearing the news which the servant from Kingsbury had brought, respecting the return of the Earl of Clifford, Fitz Payne concluded that this unexpected circumstance was in some way connected with the death of his friend Fitz Parnell.

It

It however afforded him some degree of consolation, that the Earl of Clifford was likely once more to return into the neighbourhood, where his presence was of so much importance, and where his authority was paramount to that of any other individual in that part of England.

The servant proceeded to Brierley, in obedience to the commands of his Lord; and the good fathers, with great shew of attachment to the person of the Earl of Clifford, set about preparing their accounts for his inspection; and gave the necessary directions for increasing the establishment at Kingsbury, and restoring that noble mansion to its wonted splendour.

The news of the expected return of the Earl was noised throughout the whole country; but as the family at Belton Grove, who were forbade to mention the circumstance, were the only persons, besides Sir Humphrey Bohun, at present acquainted with the residence of Clifford,

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he still remained in as much privacy as before the disclosure made by De Burgh.

As it was necessary to ascertain whether his orders had been duly attended to, he determined, that after a few days, De Burgh should go to Kingsbury in person, and take formal possession in his name; and at the same time carry a friendly message to Fitz Payne.

Bohun, who had travelled to Mordeford Castle with the utmost speed, announced to the Earl of Hereford the favourable state of convalescence in which he had left Devereux; and then surprised the company, with an account of the disclosure which had been made by De Burgh. "After this," said Sir Humphrey, "I do not despair of discovering even the black spirit; but, my dear friend Bolebec, you must forgive my having enlisted a strong body of forces to join us at Glandon; and I have also promised, that my Lord of Hereford shall accompany me to Belton Grove, to pay his respects to the widow

De la Poer, between whom and Devereux, by the way, there is a match about to be made: what say you, Hereford?"

"It never was my intention," replied the Earl, "to oppose the wishes of my son, in a matter which concerns himself so much more than me; but I should think there must be a great disparity of years between them. I could have wished that he had placed his affections on some person more nearly of his own age."

"Why zounds," said Bohun, "you do not think that he is going to be married to the old woman! I only meant, that between your son's love and the widow's contrivance, a match is to be brought about, between Devereux and the daughter of Sir Arthur Fitz Payne."

"That is quite another affair," said the Earl; "they shall have my hearty concurrence; but I know that Fitz Payne is so much connected with the Montfort family, that there may be some difficulty about it; for the Fitz-Parnells do not like me much better

better than they do Bolebec and yourself, and I should not be surprised if he were to object to the match."

"He dare not," replied Bohun, earnestly; "have we not got the hermit on our side? you do not recollect the influence of the Earl of Clifford: we will pull down Abbotsford Castle about his ears, if he will not comply."

"You have so much astonished me by your intelligence," said the Earl, "that I had forgotten that circumstance: indeed, what with the pleasure it has afforded me to hear so good an account of my son, and the surprise of the discovery respecting Clifford, you have almost driven away the gout."

"And you might have added," said the good-humoured Bohun, "what with my method of telling the story, and the prospect of a wedding, and the hopes of seeing a family of grandchildren, and many more such felicitous considerations. But come, Ralph, hoist the flag on

the Castle, and set the cellars open, and bid the cook prepare for as many guests as the hall will contain; and see that every one is made merry and comfortable; and be sure call the peasantry together from the neighbourhood of Holme Wood, and let them partake of the entertainment —and we will have a dance, and Isabella de Bolebec and myself will lead the company."

The Earl of Hereford recovered strength daily—the amendment which he thought he perceived, on hearing so favourable an account of Devereux, was not ideal, and he was soon able to travel.

Bolebec dispatched some of his servants to provide for the accommodation of his family on the road; and the old shepherd, his wife, and daughter, were sent forward towards Glandon, where they were to take the superintendance of the dairy, and were generously provided for.

The Lady Bolebec, Isabella, and Edward, attended by a numerous retinue, left

left Mordeford Castle early in the morning, and were followed by Bolebec himself, who overtook them before they had completed their first day's journey.

They were met on the road by a messenger from Glandon Tower, who was accompanied by a stranger, with a letter, which he had refused to deliver to any one, save Sir Hugh de Bolebec himself. On being admitted into the presence of the Knight, he knelt down and delivered the letter; nor could be prevailed upon to quit that posture, until Sir Hugh had perused the contents.

The letter was written by the desire of John Fitz Parnell, to inform Bolebec, that having engaged with an unknown knight, at a tournament held before the King of France, he had received a deep wound in his side, which left no chance of his recovery; and finding his end approaching, he thought it an act of justice, to confess before he died, that the villainous plot for depriving him of his only son,

had been solely contrived and executed by himself; that he had in disguise obtained admission into Glandon Tower, among the guests, at the entertainment given upon the termination of the war; and in the course of the time he was there, had succeeded in attaching to him the young woman who had the care of the child, and prevailed upon her, by great promises, to assist in the intended theft. She had accompanied him to a cottage a few miles from the Tower, where they remained concealed for some time: at length, growing weary of her, he had resolved to carry the child to Warkworth Castle, but finding that she could not be induced to part with it, unless by force, and unwilling to increase the infamy of his own conduct by any farther act of violence, he had employed a trusty servant to convey her to a place of concealment, in a remote part of the country. About this time his brother, Sir Walter, having engaged in another enterprise, which was discovered

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by the vigilance of the Earl of Glocester, the design which they had formed of exciting fresh disturbances, and revenging the death of Simon de Montfort, had been frustrated, and themselves compelled to quit the kingdom.

There was now no time for giving farther instructions relative to the child, and therefore, he had felt himself under the necessity of leaving him to the discretion of the person to whom he had been entrusted. He, however, conveyed orders to his agent, that in case of an unavoidable discovery, he should make his escape to France without delay—which he had accordingly done, and arrived there in time to inform him that the child was discovered by his parents; and to be made the bearer of this confession, and thus recommended to the mercy and forgiveness of Sir Hugh de Bolebec. He concluded with a solemn assurance, that no other person besides himself and Agnes, was concerned in the removal of the child;

that the bearer of the letter had been employed by him afterwards, and had merely acted under his orders; and commending his soul to the prayers of Dolebec, wished him a long and prosperous life.

Sir Hugh desired the man to arise from his knees, and asked if he was ready to confirm that part of the letter which related to himself? He declared his willingness so to do; and farther stated, that he was the eldest son of the shepherd, whom the knight had taken under his protection. Then again falling on his knees, he confessed that he had set on fire the hermit's hut, to which he had been tempted, he said, by the idea that he had betrayed him; but for which, he had ever since felt the sincerest contrition.

Bohun told him that he should reserve what he had to say to him, till his arrival at Glandon Tower, where the intercession of his aged parents would be his best recommendation to the clemency of the hermit, whom he had so grievously attempted

to

to injure; and that he might attend him there on his arrival.

Devereux continued progressively to advance towards a complete recovery; and although his spirits were still agitated by the various emotions of hope, love, and apprehension, the conversation of the Earl of Clifford, the widow De la Poer, and De Burgh, had considerably relieved his mind from the deep melancholy which had at first threatened it; and he was considerably improved, before the arrival of the Earl of Hereford and Sir Humphrey Bohun.

The widow De la Poer, apprised of their coming, determined, if possible, to procure an interview between the Earl of Hereford and Sir Arthur Fitz Payne, before the former left Belton Grove; and when De Burgh was setting out for Kingsbury by the desire of Clifford, to ascertain the state of affairs there, and had received his directions to visit Fitz Payne, and express the satisfaction which he should have in

restoring the friendly intercourse and good neighbourhood, which had formerly subsisted between the inhabitants of Kingsbury and Abbotsford Castle, the widow De la Poer contrived to subjoin private instructions to her brother, that he should endeavour to prevail upon Fitz Payne to accompany him on his return to Belton Grove.

De Burgh found that the monks of Brierley had not been inattentive to the directions which they had received. Numerous workmen had been sent to Kingsbury, under proper superintendants; and the steward appointed by the prior attended with his accounts, which appeared to have been kept with great punctuality and exactness. In short, the commands of the Earl of Clifford had been as completely carried into effect, as if he had himself been present to attend the execution of them; so that on the arrival of De Burgh at Kingsbury, he found every thing in such excellent condition, so many ser-

vants attending in their respective offices, and such compleat order in every part of the establishment, that he could have scarcely believed that the mansion had ever been deprived of the presence of its Lord.

He was so well satisfied with what he observed, that he presented the steward with a handsome gift, and requested him to continue in the execution of his office, to which he gladly consented.

Having taken possession of Kingsbury, in the name and by the authority of the Earl of Clifford, its lawful possessor, he proceeded the next day to Abbotsford Castle, and delivered the message with which he had been entrusted to Sir Arthur Fitz Payne.

De Burgh was well known to that family, to whom his presence was always acceptable. He was, indeed, a pleasant good-humoured companion, and as honest a man as ever breathed.

Fitz Payne appeared to be much grati-

fied by the attention paid to him by the Earl of Clifford, and eagerly enquired if he were arrived in England?

De Burgh, who did not think himself at liberty to relate the particulars which had been entrusted to him, on the subject of Clifford's late concealment, merely replied that he was; adding, that he had only received his commands a few days ago—but without mentioning that the Earl was at Belton.

Fitz Payne informed him of the death of John Fitz Parnell, and expressed his regret at an event which had deprived him of the chance of seeing the Kingsbury estate descend to the right heir of the Montforts, its ancient possessors; as well as the sorrow he felt for the loss of his friend.

De Burgh, who knew that Clifford was entirely unacquainted with this circumstance, nevertheless, in order to avoid any particular conversation on the subject of his affairs, assented to the opinion of Sir

Sir Arthur, that it was the death of Fitz Parnell which had determined the Earl to return to Kingsbury.

"He is arrived at a very great age," said Fitz Payne; "what a noble possession there will soon be for some fortunate friend, for I suppose the Earl of Clifford will not adopt Sir Walter Fitz Parnell as his heir, he had always so great a dislike to him."

"I wish," said De Burgh, "I heartily wish, Sir Arthur, that you had a son; or else, that Clifford had one to match with one of your charming daughters." The Knight smiled very complaisantly—he wished so likewise.

De Burgh delivered his sister's message, and informed Fitz Payne of the illness with which Devereux had been seized on his road from Abbotsford, and the long visit which, in consequence of it, he had made at Belton Grove.

The daughters of Fitz Payne were in the room during this conversation. De Burgh

Burgh looked at Emma, when he spoke of the dangerous disease which had so seriously threatened the life of Devereux; he observed that her countenance instantly changed, the colour forsook her lips, and she seemed to breathe with difficulty. She could scarcely suppress the rising sigh; and as she arose to quit the room, on some pretext or other, in a few moments afterwards, he perceived a tear stealing down her lovely cheek.

Fitz Payne did not seem to notice it; but expressed his serious concern for Devereux, telling De Burgh, that he had already seen enough of that young man, to convince him that he would one day rival the fame of his illustrious father; and indeed, that at present he only wanted experience to make him a good general.—"My regard for him is so great," continued Fitz Payne, "that his being at the Grove, is a strong inducement for me to comply with your sister's invitation."

"Will not that inducement be still more

more strengthened," said De Burgh, "when I inform you that Hereford himself is expected at Belton in a few days?"

"I should be most happy to pay my duty to him," replied Fitz Payne; "many years have elapsed since I saw the Earl, and there are few men for whom I have a greater respect. My connexion with the Montforts has for a long time interrupted our intercourse, but my respect for my old general is unabated. I will certainly attend you to Belton Grove; but I have some affairs to settle, which, besides my inclination to keep you at Abbotsford Castle as long as I can, must postpone our journey for at least a day or two."

De Burgh could not refuse to await his convenience, and therefore only requested that Fitz Payne would accomplish the business in hand, with as much expedition as possible.

"You must know," said Fitz Payne, "that Sir Michael Fettiplace has applied to me in behalf of his nephew, whom he wishes

wishes to introduce into my family on the footing of a lover. The old Knight has promised to settle upon him his property at Swimbrooke, and I expect young Fettiplace here to-morrow, for my answer to the proposal."

De Burgh thought it very fortunate to have thus, as it were by mere accident, discovered what was going forward. It occurred to him that the hopes of his friend Devereux might depend on the event of the present hour; and, therefore, pursuing the conversation, observed, that he supposed the young people already understood one another; "for," added he, "there is no happiness in the marriage state, when the knot is tied by compulsion."

"My daughter is too young to have formed any previous attachment," said Fitz Payne; "and she has been too carefully educated, for me to doubt her obedience to my wishes. I have not, indeed, said any thing to her on the subject at present,

present, for I have never seen the gentleman myself."

Now then, thought De Burgh, is the time for me to speak. "My dear friend, I am persuaded that my long intimacy with you will be a sufficient apology for the great liberty of obtruding any observations on so delicate an affair; but were I in your place, I would not be over hasty in concluding upon the match at present. Who knows what may happen with regard to Kingsbury? I only mean that I should not be inclined to decide upon the business, without first mentioning it to the Earl of Clifford. Old men always like to be consulted; and though you are not obliged to relinquish your design in consequence of his opinion, it might be worth while to cultivate his friendship, by such a proof of your respect and deference."

"De Burgh," replied Sir Arthur, "the same thought had already occurred to me. The affair may be of great importance.

I will

I will not stir a step in the business without consulting the Earl."

Fettiplace arrived the next day. He was personally known to De Burgh, and had been an officer under Simon de Montfort. He addressed Sir Arthur Fitz Payne with great confidence, and delivered a letter from his uncle.

Fitz Payne read it; and then addressing himself to the young gentleman, in the presence of De Burgh, told him, that he was very sensible of the honour of an alliance with the family of Sir Michael Fettiplace, but that circumstances had recently happened, which rendered it necessary for him to take more time, before he made up his mind on the subject; and that, at present, he must be excused making any direct reply to the proposal.

Fettiplace seemed not only surprised, but almost offended, by the coldness of this reception; and pressed Sir Arthur to mention the circumstances to which he alluded. The Knight told him they were entirely

entirely of a domestic nature, and of course, only of consequence to those who actually belonged to his own family: and as he did not manifest any inclination to introduce the expectant lover to the young lady, Fettiplace soon took leave.

As soon as he was gone, "I thought," said Fitz Payne, "that it would not be right to tantalize the girl by introducing him; but it will be time enough when I have consulted the Earl of Clifford, for I shall certainly submit the proposal to his consideration, and be guided by his advice. However, I dare say he will agree with me, that it is a good offer; and he knows that Montfort had a great friendship for the family."

De Burgh now pressed the Knight to think of setting out for the Grove; and he agreed to accompany him the next morning.

The Earl of Hereford was so much recovered from the gout, that he performed his

his journey to Belton more easily and expeditiously than he had expected.

The meeting between himself and Devereux was tender and interesting; the countenance of the former still exhibited the languor of sickness, and excited the sentiment of parental anxiety. Hereford affectionately embraced his son, then turning to the Earl of Clifford—"I do not congratulate the Earl of Clifford on a disclosure which, as it was unnecessary for the production of the sincerest friendship and veneration, so can neither heighten the one nor augment the other; but I rejoice that his friends have now obtained a security for his continuance among them."

The venerable Clifford pressed the hand of his friend between both his own; but was unable to articulate a reply.

Sir Humphrey Bohun enquired after his friend De Burgh, and being told that he was gone to Sir Arthur Fitz Payne's—"Are you

you not very anxious for his return?" said he, addressing Devereux.

"*I* am," replied the widow De la Poer; "for I desired him to invite Sir Arthur to return with him; and am, therefore, at present in suspense, whether I may expect him or not."

At midnight, when every one at Belton Grove was wrapt in profound sleep, excepting Devereux, who was revolving in his mind the possibilities which might render the proposal which his father had kindly promised to make to Sir Arthur Fitz Payne ineffectual, and tormenting himself by the anticipation of disappointment, a violent knocking at the gate disturbed the whole family.

On opening the gate, a messenger presented a letter addressed to the Earl of Clifford. It contained the following words—

"My

" MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE discovered the black spirit. Hasten to Glandon Tower as soon as possible.

Ever yours,

BOLEBEC."

Clifford occupied the apartment contiguous to that of Devereux. Supposing that he must have been already awakened by the noise at the gate, he carried the letter to his chamber.

Devereux perused it.—" Pray, my Lord," said he, " do not let Sir Humphrey know any thing of the matter. Some deception must have been practised, and he will set no bounds to his triumph."

The Earl desired that the messenger might be sent to him. He found that the letter had been entrusted to his care by a servant, who, having arrived at his cottage in the dusk of the evening, and being ignorant of the road to Belton, had requested

ed him to be the bearer of it; and to return with any answer which it might require, whilst he remained to rest himself at his cottage; but the man neither knew whence the letter came, nor to whom the servant belonged that brought it.

Secure, therefore, from any discovery, it was agreed upon between Clifford and Devereux, to account for the disturbance which had happened in the night, by saying that it was a messenger with a letter for the Earl of Clifford, without explaining further particulars.

However, the Earl of Hereford was entrusted with the secret, and he was scarcely less astonished than Clifford himself at the contents.

The widow De la Poer supposed it to be a communication either from the Abbot of Brierley, or from her brother, in consequence of his visit to Kingsbury; but Bohun, without giving himself any trouble to form a serious conjecture, or the least suspicion of the real fact, said that it was

a letter

a letter for Devereux from Abbotsford Castle, which he had prevailed upon the Earl to acknowledge for his own; and rallied him about the contents, until Clifford shewed him the cover, which, not being in the hand-writing of Bolebec himself, was not likely to lead to detection.

"Well," said Bohun, "if it be not from Emma Fitz Payne, I am sure it must come from the black spirit."

"Take care, Sir Humphrey," said Clifford, smiling, "it is ill jesting with edge tools—you do not know how soon he may pay you a visit."

When Fitz Payne and De Burgh arrived at the Grove, the two Earls were gone to take a long walk on the bank of the Severn. Sir Arthur paid his respects to the widow De la Poer, and then congratulated Devereux, on the advancement which he was making towards the complete recovery of his health; at the same time, expressing his regret for the illness which he had suffered, and the alteration which it had

had made in his looks, since he had the pleasure of seeing him at Abbotsford. Devereux enquired earnestly after the family at the Castle, and was informed in reply, that the eldest daughter of the Knight had been seriously indisposed for several days.

"You should have brought her hither," said Bohun, "for the widow De la Poer is the best nurse in the kingdom; it is astonishing what service her assistance has rendered to Devereux; and I'll engage for it, your daughter would have recovered in a few days—do you not think so, Devereux?"

The countenance of the latter betrayed his confusion; he could only reply, "that he was under infinite obligations to the kindness and hospitality of the widow, which had so greatly contributed to his own amendment."

It had been determined not to mention to Sir Arthur Fitz Payne, that the Earl of

Clifford was at Belton Grove; and on his return from his walk, he immediately retired to his own apartment, and sent for De Burgh, who gave him an exact and satisfactory account of his proceedings at Kingsbury, and of his reception at Abbotsford Castle. He also related the conversation which had passed respecting Fettiplace.

In the mean time, the Earl of Hereford had an interview with Sir Arthur Fitz Payne; and the first compliments being over, determined to lose no time in making the intended proposal. It was very opportunely introduced by the widow De la Poer. The Knight had been thanking her for her attention to Devereux, and added, in the most friendly manner, that he had so great a regard for the young man, that he considered her kindness a favour conferred upon himself.

"The method by which, Sir Knight, you can easily repay the obligation," said the

the widow, "is to complete what I have begun. The recovery of Devereux depends principally on yourself."

Fitz Payne appeared to be surprised; indeed, he had never entertained the most distant idea of what was passing in the minds both of Devereux and of his daughter, whose indisposition was, in reality, occasioned by the intelligence of the illness of Devereux, which had been brought to Abbotsford Castle by De Burgh.

The Earl of Hereford then briefly explained the affair, and concluded with telling him, that he hoped he had no objection to receive his son into the family; and that he might be permitted to pay his addresses at Abbotsford, in form.

Fitz Payne, who would have readily preferred Devereux to Fettiplace, as a husband for his daughter, was yet doubtful whether he ought to venture upon a step, by which he was certain to disoblige one of the two parties, without at least conciliating the favour of Clifford. He there-

fore said, that in an affair of so much consequence, he hoped the Earl would excuse his declining to answer his proposal, until he had time to consult with a particular friend, by whose opinion he was in some measure bound to regulate his determination; at the same time, expressing his acknowledgments of the great honour conferred upon him, by the offer of such an alliance, and repeating his declaration of regard and esteem for Devereux.

Hereford replied, that the object he had in view was to secure the happiness of his son, by promoting a union with a young lady, who was represented to him, as possessed of every accomplishment likely to make the marriage state happy; that in point of rank and fortune, Devereux was entitled to consider himself at least equal to most young men in the kingdom; and in disposition and endowments, it was not the partiality of the father, but the justice of the man, which compelled him to say, that there were few who had superior

claims

claims to attention. He said, that he would readily admit the prudence of not deciding hastily on an affair of so much importance, and on which the happiness not only of the individuals themselves, but perhaps of future generations, might depend; but he added, that it was due to his own honour, and the feelings of his son, to entreat that a speedy answer might be given to his proposal, "which, however," concluded the Earl, "you will be pleased to remember, Sir Arthur, is entirely conditional, and subject to the unbiassed and uninfluenced decision of the young lady herself."

Fitz Payne assured the Earl that he had no desire to procrastinate the business, much less to trifle with him and his son, for whom he entertained the sincerest regard and good opinion; but that the death of his late friend Fitz Parnell, had occasioned so much uncertainty respecting the future possession of the extensive domains of the Earl of Clifford, (which, nearly

surrounding Abbotsford Castle, rendered him, if not dependant upon the proprietor of that estate, at least liable to great inconvenience, if he neglected to cultivate his friendship), that it was absolutely necessary for him to be satisfied that he should not give offence in that quarter, by gratifying his own wishes on the present occasion.

"Let us understand each other," said Hereford; "do you agree to the match, subject to the decision of the Earl of Clifford, provided the lady have no objection?"

"I do not mean exactly that," replied Fitz Payne; "I have no particular wish to consult the Earl of Clifford, as an individual—but I am ready to consent to the marriage of your son with my daughter, provided the possessor of Kingsbury, be he whom he may, is agreeable to it."

"Agreed," said the Earl; and they cordially shook hands.

Hereford withdrew. Bohun and Devereux

reux had gone to the Earl of Clifford's apartment, to arrange the plan of their journey to Glandon Tower, which the Earl was more particularly anxious to commence without delay, on account of the letter he had received from Bolebec; and Sir Humphrey, because he was never so happy as in the company of that amiable and excellent family.

The Earl of Hereford entered the room, and addressing himself to Clifford, informed him of the conversation which had just before taken place with Sir Arthur Fitz Payne.—"Thus, my good Lord," said he, "we are now suitors for your favour."

"This is the very thing I wished," said Bohun; "now, my noble Clifford, the first act of benevolence in your proper character, is to render our young friend happy for life. You will not be long in settling the balance between Fitz Payne's inclination and his interest; and

thus put an end to all this sighing, and doubt, and despondency!"

The Earl of Clifford looked unusually grave, and replied, with more than usual seriousness—"Whatever be in my power, Devereux may command, but I have seriously determined never to exercise authority, for the purpose of restraining or influencing others. Every man who is controlled by such authority is a slave, either to his own selfishness or timidity, or to the tyranny or insolence of him to whom he is in subjection. This is my determination, and the success of Devereux must entirely depend upon himself—he must be the arbiter of his own fate!"

Devereux, who a moment before had been elevated on the pinnacle of hope, and confiding in the promise of Clifford, had almost called the lovely Emma his own, was now reduced to a condition bordering on despair. De Burgh thought the Earl had taken offence at the freedom with

with which he had been treated by Bohun. Hereford was astonished, and began to suspect that this extraordinary and unexpected refusal, to render assistance where it was so much wanted, was the effect of caprice; but Bohun, who, in the long experience which he had of the generosity of Clifford's disposition, had never known him either forget a promise, or neglect to serve any one whom he could benefit by his assistance, felt convinced that every thing would end satisfactorily.

A general pause ensued. "Come," said Bohun, "put an end to this *druidical* mystery."

The Earl of Clifford drew from his bosom a scrap of parchment, and presenting it to Devereux, said—"Try the effect of this charm, and ask Sir Arthur Fitz Payne to read it."

It was a deed of gift of the magnificent palace, which Devereux had so much admired, and the immense possessions at-

tached to it. The forms of law were then more quaint than tedious: it was couched in the following terms:—

"The lands King Richard gave to me,
To hold the same of him in fee,
John Devereux, I give to thee.

The service I was bound to pay,
Unto the King, by night or day,
On thee and thine, I bind and lay.

At Westminster, on bended knee,
What time my liege should crowned be,
A mess of dalegrout presented,
Was always graciously reverted;
The cup and cover, as a fee,
The King returned unto me,
But first he dipp'd therein his hands,
And thus confirm'd to me my lands.

This service being paid by thee,
Unto the King, on bended knee,
Thy lands from soc and burgage free.

Witness myself, the Earl of Clifford,
And William, Earl of Hereford,
Sir Humphrey, of Mordeford;

Surnam'd

Susnam'd Bohun, of ancient right,
Arthur Fitz Payne, that worthy Knight,
And John De Burgh, of Langford Hight.

Which I confirm, and so forsooth,
Have bit the wax, with my wang tooth."

The whole company were astonished; but when Hereford attempted to return his acknowledgments for so extraordinary an instance of munificence, the venerable Clifford interrupted him, by saying—"It is a very small thing for me to give away that for which I have no use. My feelings would never allow me to set my foot over the threshold at Kingsbury: am I not going to visit my friends at Glandon Tower, and thence to Ashbury, and can such an old man look beyond the termination of a few months, for the arrival of that period, when he shall be received into the mansion of eternal rest? Devereux owes me no thanks for rendering myself happy, by contributing to his comfort,

without deviating from my own resolutions."

Bohun took Devereux by the arm; the latter was totally deprived of utterance, and Sir Humphrey well knew that Clifford would not endure any compliments. He led him into the presence of Sir Arthur Fitz Payne, and with a low bow said, "Permit me to introduce the possessor of Kingsbury, who is about to become a neighbour to you, Sir Arthur." Devereux still held the parchment in his hand, and Bohun perceiving that Fitz Payne was nearly as much astonished as Devereux himself, immediately took it from him, and read it audibly before the Knight and the widow De la Poer.

Fitz Payne embraced his intended son-in-law, and was then informed that the Earl of Clifford was at Belton Grove. He hastened to pay his respects; and would have touched upon the subject of his princely munificence, but the Earl pre-

vented

vented him, by enjoining the strictest silence on that topic.

It was impossible to restrain Devereux from an immediate journey to Abbotsford, and Clifford was almost equally anxious to proceed to Glandon Tower. It was therefore agreed upon, that the Earl and Bohun should set out the next morning; that Devereux should accompany Sir Arthur Fitz Payne to Abbotsford Castle; and that the Earl of Hereford, with the widow De la Poer and her brother, should leave the Grove the day following, and proceed to Woodstock, where they were to be rejoined by Sir Arthur and Devereux; and if the Lady Fitz Payne could be prevailed upon to undertake so long a journey, by herself and her daughters. Bohun had insisted that every one should bind himself by a promise not to exceed ten days, before he made his appearance at Glandon Tower, as, he said, he was determined to keep a merry Christmas there.

Clifford

Clifford and Sir Humphrey reached Glandon, without any thing remarkable having occurred on the road. The former was much entertained by the historical detail which Bohun gave him as they rode along, of the principal events in which he had borne a conspicuous part during the late war, more especially as they passed near the scene of those exploits.

They were received at Glandon, with the accustomed hospitality and kindness of Bolebec.

Clifford, who was impatient to hear the explanation which the letter of Sir Hugh had promised him, seized the earliest opportunity of speaking to him alone.

Bolebec informed the Earl of the communication which he had received when on the road from Mordeford, and the subsequent confession of the man who brought it, and who voluntarily acknowledged that he set fire to the hermitage.

He was afterwards brought into the presence of Sir Hugh de Bolebec, at Glandon Tower,

Tower, and there made a compleat disclosure of the deception which he had practised, in order to impose upon the hermit at Holme Wood.

He informed Bolebec, that after having left his father's dwelling, he fell in with a banditti, who were very expert in the commission of various frauds and deceptions, by which they imposed on the ignorant and unwary, and despoiled them of their property.

One of this gang was a foreigner, who possessed the remarkable power of being able to modulate his voice in such a manner, that he could cause it to be heard as if proceeding from various parts of a room, or from any object animate or inanimate near to him. It was effected by an internal effort, unaccompanied by the smallest motion of his lips; and he was so expert in the performance of it, and so exact in his imitations of different voices and sounds, that he had occasioned a man to pull down a stack of hay, by imitating the

the cries of a cat, which was supposed to have been immured in it, and perishing with hunger. At another time he had caused a waggon to be unloaded, by imitating the voice of an infant, which seemed to issue from amongst the packages, and terrified the driver almost out of his senses.

The fellow, by frequent practice, and the instructions of the foreigner, after some time acquired a similar power of ventriloquism; and having become the servant of Fitz Parnell, often amused his master by an exhibition of his talents. He was employed to conduct Edward de Bolebec and his nurse, from the cottage in which they had been left by Fitz Parnell. He first removed them to the hut of a woodman, to which he had occasionally retreated, and from thence to the ruins of Rosemont Castle; where, finding it very difficult to procure food for them, without exciting suspicions, which he was apprehensive might lead to a detection of the

place

place of their concealment, he had devised the scheme of trying the effect of his art upon the hermit.

He accordingly visited him in the night, and having found his first effort successful, frequently repeated it, in the manner which has been already related; throwing the sound of his voice in different directions, sometimes causing it to issue from the bed on which the hermit lay, sometimes from his chair, and different parts of the hut.

He knew that it was of great importance to prevent him from coming to the ruins of Rosemont; and having incautiously mentioned where the woman was, he afterwards thought it would divert the hermit from the intention he at first expressed, of going in search of her, if he gratified his curiosity by the scene which has been mentioned, as taking place on the hill near the hermitage; and he thus obtained a sight of the hermit, whom he had before only visited by night.

He

He found that the character he had assumed of *the black spirit*, had enabled him to make a strong impression on the mind of the hermit; but he was astonished at his boldness in following him to the grotto among the rocks; and when he resorted to the practice of whispering in his ear, at the very entrance of the recess into which he had just retired, he had scarcely any hope remaining that he should avoid a discovery. He however succeeded by this manœuvre, and escaped detection.

He had promised to make his father and mother partakers of the reward which he expected for his fidelity to Fitz Parnell; and intended, when the child should have been removed to a place of security, to have visited Rosemont again; when he had resolved to send some person to the hermit, with a present, in return for the provisions with which he had been supplied; and had, in a sort of parabolical manner, alluded to this intention, when he

he told the hermit that a stranger should visit him from a distant country, and explain the mystery of the transaction. Lest he should not be able to accomplish his design, he left some money in the pitcher, the last time he visited the hermitage.

When he found that the child had been carried away from Rosemont, he concluded that the hermit had given intelligence to the neighbouring cottagers, and as he had committed some depredations among their property, he expected every moment to become the victim of their resentment, until the terror of his mind increased to such a degree, that he was prompted to the villainous effort to burn the hermitage, for which he had ever afterwards felt the deepest remorse.

The man confirmed the truth of what he said, by exhibiting similar powers to those which he had described, in the presence of Sir Hugh de Bolebec and his attendants; indeed, it required no additional proof, besides its exact agreement with the circumstances

cumstances which had happened within the knowledge of Bolebec himself, and the narrative related by the hermit. He had, therefore, forwarded a notification of the discovery to the Earl of Clifford, and now submitted the party to his justice and disposal.

Clifford desired to see the man, and on his entering the room, asked him whether he knew the black spirit of the Wye? The fellow, who had already understood that the hermit had been transformed into the Earl of Clifford, fell on his knees and entreated forgiveness.

"I ask you," said Clifford, "are you the spirit who visited my hermitage?"

The man immediately answered by the usual whisper, "I am, my Lord, and I supplicate your mercy."

"I freely forgive you," said the Earl; "but tell me how you perform this wonderful deception."

He replied, that he could not account for the manner in which it was done; that

that he compressed his throat by a voluntary effort, and that he perceived a great internal commotion, which was differently modulated, as he conveyed his voice to objects more or less distant from him. He then gave several proofs of ventriloquism.

"Hereford was perfectly right," said the Earl, turning to Sir Hugh de Bolebec, "when he said, that as an explanation of this affair must reach us through the medium of our corporeal senses, it must resolve itself into plain matter of fact, capable of demonstration."

The man was then ordered to withdraw.

The Earl of Clifford requested Bolebec not to disclose to Bohun the discovery which had been made. "I could wish," added he, "to convince Sir Humphrey by an experiment, if I thought he would not be terrified by it."

Bolebec assented; and they agreed that the black spirit should visit Bohun, when he retired to his chamber.

In

In order to mark the respect which the family of Bolebec was desirous of shewing to the Earl of Clifford, he was lodged in what was denominated the state-room, and which was never before occupied by any one besides the King himself, and Prince Edward, on his late visit to Glandon Tower.

Bohun was accommodated in the apartment which had usually been appropriated to him when he slept at the Tower; the same which he had so long occupied, when he commanded the garrison in the absence of Sir Hugh de Bolebec. It was in one of the turrets, which, from this circumstance, was called Bohun's Tower. The staircase which immediately led to it, was of stone; and a gallery surrounded it, which had a communication with the leads. Recesses had been cut in the solid walls of this gallery, which were of immense thickness. In one of them, which was the nearest to that part of the chamber where Bohun's bed was placed, the

ventriloquist

ventriloquist, by order of Bolebec and the Earl of Clifford, was concealed.

It was late before the company separated. The Earl of Clifford had entered, with unusual chearfulness and glee, into the conversation of the evening; and the vivacity of Bohun had enlivened the guests, by incessant sallies of wit and pleasantry.

The Knight was one of the last to retire to his chamber; and as he was preparing to step into bed, was surprised by a hoarse voice, which thus addressed him—"Incredulous Bohun, and dost thou still deny the existence of our race?"

He started. The moon shone bright into the chamber: he could see no one. "Who is it speaking to me?" cried he, turning towards the door.

"I am the spirit of Arthur," said the voice.

Bohun involuntarily looked round towards the opposite corner of the apartment, whence the voice seemed to proceed—

deed—he perceived nothing but an old sword which stood there. "Where art thou then?" said the Knight, who, in spite of all his resolution, was surprised and astonished—"I can see nobody."

"Neither can I," said the voice; "but if thou wilt draw me out of the scabbard, we may look each other in the face."

Bohun could scarcely believe his ears. He, however, took hold of the sword, and immediately perceived that it was the same weapon which the Earl of St. Clair had brought from Wallingford, a relick of King Arthur, given to him by Lacy, the Governor, when Sir Hugh de Bolebec had effected St. Clair's enlargement.

He drew the sword, and examined the blade by the light of the moon. He fancied that he perceived it jarred his arm, whilst the voice seemed to run along the steel, and again addressed him:—"Carry me, I pray, to the Earl of Clifford; my brother, the black spirit, has sent a message to him."

Bohun, though not terrified, for he really did not know what fear was, was nevertheless palpitating with stupendous wonder. He took the naked sword in his hand, and attempted to unbolt the door; in order to do it with more facility, he was about to lay down the sword, which was one of those unwieldy instruments, rather fitted for a gigantic hand, than that of a man of ordinary strength.

"Do not hurt me," said the voice; "carry me safe."

Bohun opened the door with one hand, whilst he still held the sword in the other. He descended the stairs—and then recollected that he did not know in what part of the Tower the Earl was lodged.

He was near the windows of the kitchen. There was yet a light burning—"Is any one in attendance?" said Bohun.

A servant answered, "I will be with you immediately, Sir Humphrey."

The man followed him.

"Shew me the way to the Earl of Clifford's chamber," said Bohun.

The servant seemed to hesitate; he looked at the naked sword.

"There is no harm, my friend," said Bohun; "but I believe this sword is bewitched. It has been talking to me."

"Oh, Sir Humphrey, it is Arthur's sword," said the fellow.

"Did you ever hear it speak?" enquired Bohun.

"O yes, frequently, Sir."

They walked towards the chamber.

"Knock at the door," said Bohun, "and tell the Earl not to be alarmed; I am only come to speak to him"

The attendant obeyed. The Earl opened the door.

"My Lord," said Sir Humphrey, "this is a strange affair."

"What is the matter, Bohun?" said Clifford.

"I can scarcely tell; but this sword actually

actually spoke to me, and desired me to bring it to you; it has a message from the black spirit."

"Pho, pho, Bohun, this is too bad."

"By my soul, my Lord, it is true."

"Where is the demonstrative proof, Sir Humphrey?"

"Why I will swear to the fact, and the servant has heard it."

Bohun looked at the sword with attention. "Have I," said he to himself, "been all this while a dupe to my own imagination? the thing is impossible." He threw the sword on the floor.

"How can you be so cruel? you have broke my back," said the voice.

"There," cried Bohun, "are you satisfied now?"

"Spirit of Arthur," said the Knight, "did not you desire me to bring you to the Earl of Clifford?"

No reply was given.

"You have destroyed the spirit," said

Clifford; "perhaps he was killed by the fall."

"What shall be done with the sword?" said Bohun.

"Carry it back again," said the Earl; "I do not want to have any thing to say to Arthur."

Bohun took the sword again into his hand; when a groan, like that of a person in great pain, issued from the handle of it.

"What is the matter?" said Bohun.

"You have almost killed me by the fall," replied the voice; "did I not tell you that you had broken my back? Oh, my back! my back!"

Sir Hugh de Bolebec now entered the chamber, and affected much surprise at the noise he had heard.

"Bolebec," said Sir Humphrey, "do you know any thing about this sword?"

Sir Hugh cast his eyes upon it, and smiling said—"It is St. Clair's old sword, that which Lacy gave him at Wallingford."

"It

"It has been conversing with us," said Bohun.

"That I can never believe, unless I hear it," said Bolebec; "you must excuse me indeed, bold Bohun; it is too much like the black spirit."

"By my faith," said Bohun, "it declared itself to be the brother of the black spirit."

Bolebec laughed.

Bohun addressed the sword again, but could obtain no answer; at last, having exhausted his patience, in fruitless efforts to renew the conversation, he bade good night to the Earl and Bolebec, and once more retired to bed, where he lay ruminating on the affair until morning, without having been able to procure a wink of sleep.

When he arose, he proceeded in haste to the apartment of the Earl of Clifford, and recapitulated all the circumstances of the affair. Clifford seemed to be very

little surprised at it, which Bohun attributed to his former intercourse with the black spirit, of whose story he now believed every particle.

The subject filled his mind completely; he could neither think nor speak of any thing but the sword of Arthur; but all his efforts to make it speak to him again were ineffectual.

In a few days the party from Belton Grove, accompanied by Devereux and Sir Arthur Fitz Payne, arrived at Glandon. The ladies from Abbotsford Castle were deterred, by the weather and the state of the roads, from undertaking the journey.

The Earl of Hereford had scarcely entered the gates of the Tower, before Bohun introduced his astonishing account of the sword. Bolebec gave the Earl a private hint, that a deception had been practised upon him. He affected, therefore, not to believe the possibility of the thing.

"You might as well admit," said the Earl, "that the black spirit of the Wye was a real fairy."

"I do, my Lord," replied Bohun; "I believe it all; I subscribe to it in good faith; I will never more contend against it."

"But what proof is there?" said Hereford.

"My own ears," cried Bohun. "I solemnly aver the fact."

"So did Clifford before," said the Earl; "but you were incredulous. Let me see the sword."

It was brought to him.

"This sword can no more speak," said the Earl, "than my walking-stick; there must have been confederacy."

"What confederacy?" said Bohun, somewhat angrily.

"The man," replied Clifford, "whom you brought with you to my chamber."

Sir Humphrey was become almost frantic.

"Have

"Have patience," said Clifford; "order the man to come in who lighted Sir Humphrey Bohun to my chamber, when the sword spoke."

The servant attended.

"Look upon that person earnestly," said Clifford.

Bohun looked steadily at him.—"I have seen him before," said he; "but I do not know when."

"Do you remember the robbers in the wood?" said the man.

"I do," said Bohun, "but you were the dumb one; you were not the fellow who talked to me."

"I knew better than to be insolent when I saw you, Sir Humphrey; I hope you will forgive me."

"What has this to do with the sword?" added Bohun.

"It was I who spoke, not the sword," said the man; and immediately, by the desire of Clifford, entertained the company, by repeating the conversation with which he

he had so completely deceived the Knight, through the means of his ventriloquism.

" I am satisfied about every thing relative to this matter," said Bohun ; " but I have another question to ask—what was your real object in robbing that poor woman near the woodman's hut?"

" It was with an intention to procure clothes for Agnes," said the fellow ; " and the woodman's son was the person who accompanied my brother and myself to Rosemont ruins, with her and the child."

The company were astonished in turn, at the explanation of the deceit which had been practised ; and Bohun told the ventriloquist, that if he would promise hereafter, never to employ this extraordinary faculty in an improper manner, but for the purpose of harmless amusement, or the gratification of rational curiosity, he would amply provide for his maintenance and support.

The company were now as happy as health,

health, friendship, and affluence, could make them. The gentle Bereux had the satisfaction of finding that his love for the beautiful Emma Fitz Payne was returned by a reciprocal affection; and the enjoyment of the comforts which were presented to his future hopes, was augmented by intelligence which was brought from the Earl of St. Clair, that having been honoured by marks of peculiar distinction, through the favour of Prince Edward, he was preparing for his return to England, with that brave and gallant commander.

St. Clair had distinguished himself by the most heroic valour; and had faithfully and assiduously attended his royal master, at the time he was wounded by a Saracen with an empoisoned dart; and rescued from death, by the magnanimity and affection of his beloved Eleanor.

The expectation of the return of her brother, animated the Lady Bolebec with the

the liveliest joy, and diffused universal chearfulness among the guests at Glandon Tower, which was for a long time the scene of festivity and happiness.

FINIS.

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WORKS

Printed at the Minerva-Press,

With the Reviewers' Opinion.

CELIA IN SEARCH OF A HUSBAND,

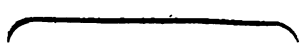
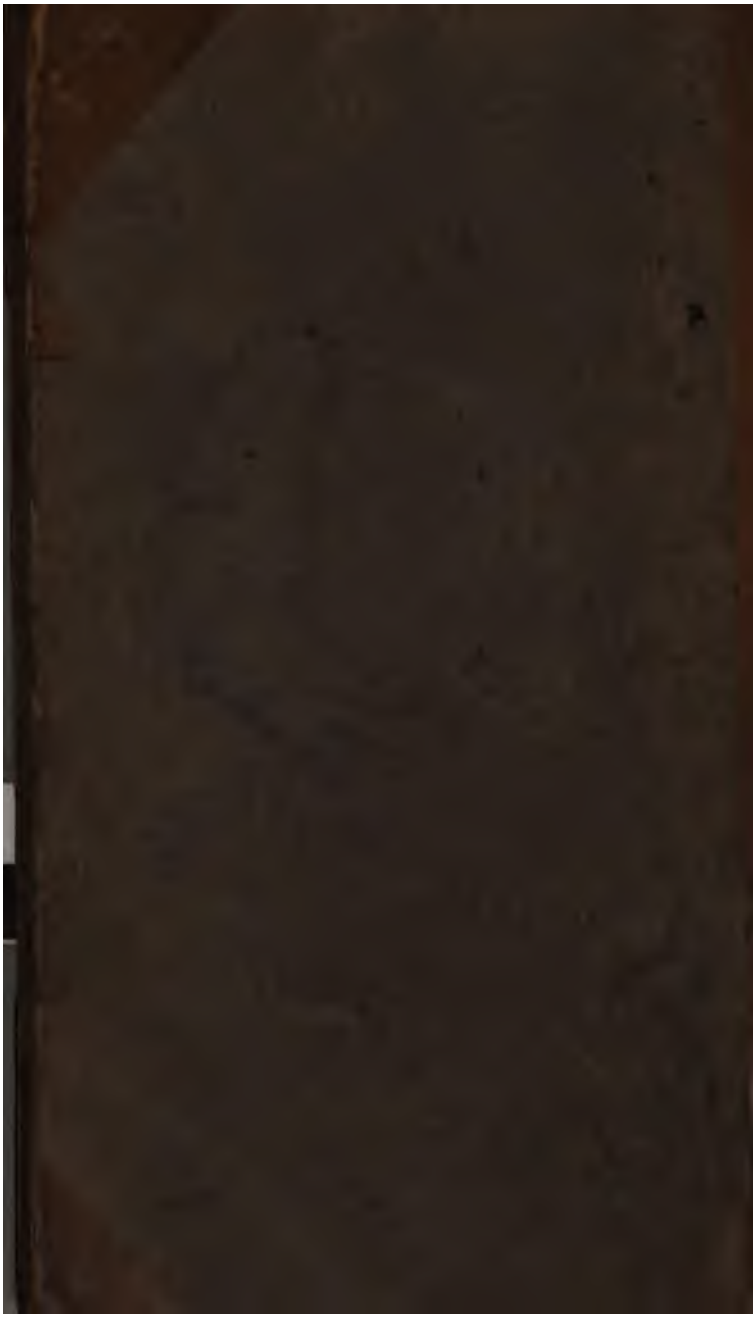
BY A MODERN ANTIQUE.

THIRD EDITION.

2 vols. 8vo. 12s. boards.

After reading in the Preface to this Novel, a kind of confession that it was written in haste, in order to be first in the market, after the impression made by Cœlebs, we were not a little surprised to find it a production of so much merit.

It is neither an answer to Cœlebs, nor a ridicule, nor an imitation of it; unless, indeed, the heroine, Celia Delacour, should be compared to Lucilla Stanley. It is a pointed and well-written satire upon the follies and vices of fashionable life, as contemplated by Celia, in a visit to her *townish* sister in London. Celia is not literally in *search of a husband*, nor does she find one, in London. She was not indeed likely to find one, suited to her taste and feelings, among such creatures as she there encounters. We are extremely sorry to say, that, as far as our knowledge of fashionable life goes, the picture is generally like. We say it with the more sorrow, because we know it to be very possible, that the vices and follies of one important class may bring down the very worst evils upon the whole community. It is true, indeed, that we know of some eminent exceptions to the general censure, but what are a few exceptions, when corrupt example so abundantly prevails?

The anonymous "modern antique" is announced in the preface as a female. Whether this be the fact or not, is of little consequence; the writer is ingenious, and appears to have correct views both of what is and what should be. Instead of satirising Cœlebs, she or he speaks of that work in the most cordial terms of admiration.

British Critic, Oct. 1809.